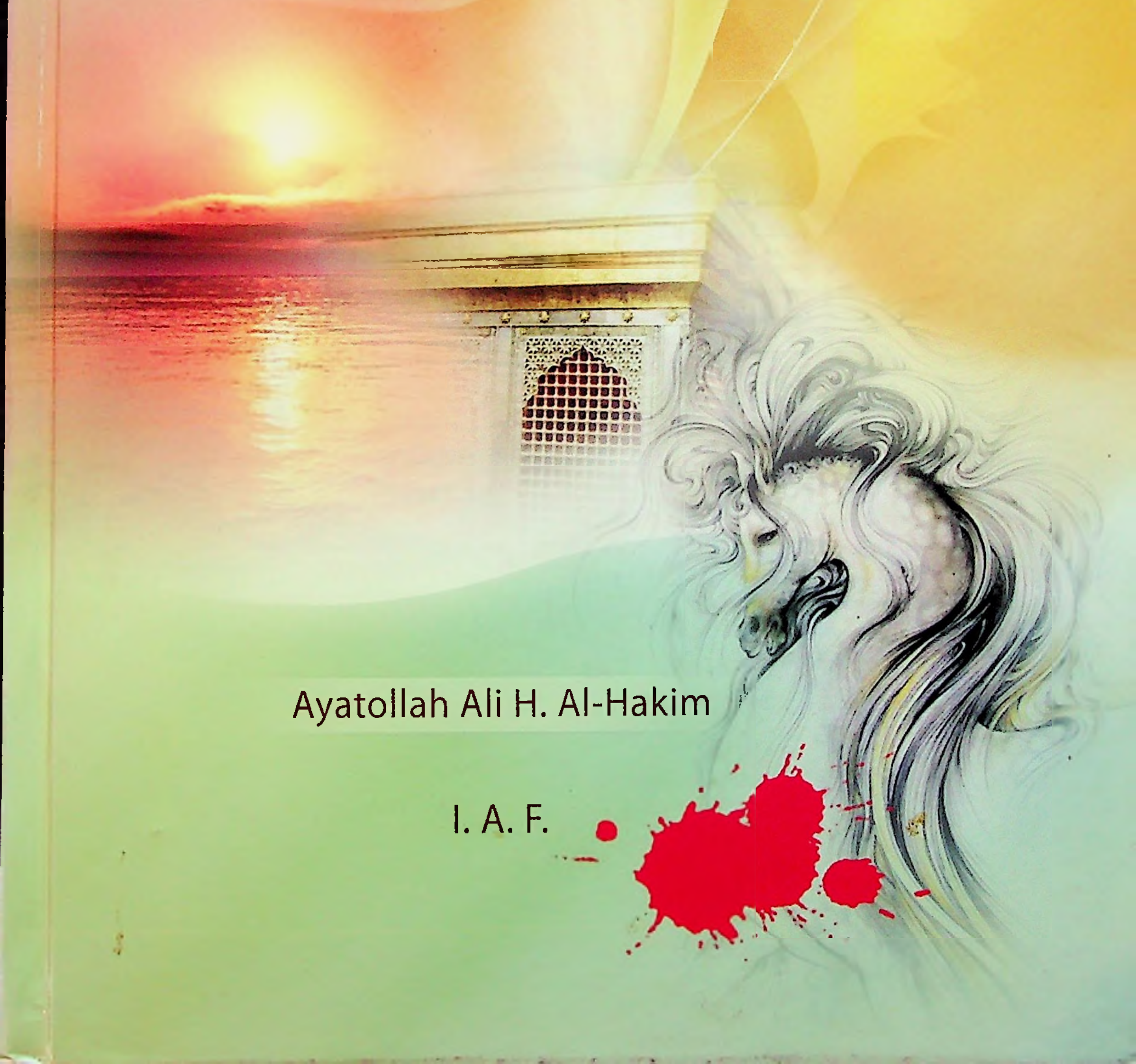
THE MARTYR OF FREEDOM



Ayatollah Ali H. Al-Hakim

I. A. F.

'This work is absolutely brilliant and thought-provoking... I hope and pray that the results of author's work are fecund and effective in healing the terrible wounds... I address the author directly: Blessings, blessings, blessings be upon you, Ayatollah!'

James David Audlin, American author of 'The Circle of Life'

'In this volume of the work of 'Allamah S. Ali H. Al-hakim, we read the answer to all the questions which have been troubling the Muslims regarding Imam Husayn (as) and his sacrifice.'

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'Many books have been written about Imam Husayn, however it is no criticism to remark of them that they are often repetitious. However, the present work, 'Martyr of Freedom', by A. H. Al-Hakim stands apart, essentially, by a number of original features, and most significantly an exploration of the 'irfani (mystical) dimensions of the Imam and his martyrdom.'

Dr. Hamid Algar, Professor of Islamic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, USA

'This study brings together the great Shi'ah traditions of supplication (du'ā) and Islamic mysticism (irfān), bringing to light the dimensions of Imam Husayn (as) by examining his role as the heir of the prophets using an analytical methodology applied to Shaikh al-Akbar Ibn 'Arabi's theories... Thus we see how Imam Husayn (as) perfectly embodied the prophetic path, his life culminating in the highest station of spiritual realisation through embracing the 'One Reality' in supreme annihilation: an act of martyrdom which to this day shines as a brilliant light for those seeking guidance.'

Dr. Rebecca Masterton, Lecturer, ICAS, affiliated to the University of Middlesex, London

'The efforts of several years by Ayatollah Ali H. Al-hakim are worth praising and special gratitude, particularly his unique presentation and innovative manifestation of the revolution of Imam Husayn (as). This book is unique, innovative and thoughts provoking. Its distinctive and fascinating feature is reflected in its superb comparison of Imam Husayn's (as) spiritual experience with that of some of the Godly prophets, while introducing the historical and mystical characters of his personality, not to forget the book's captivating title.'

Dr. Asghar Muntazir Al-Qa'im, Dean of Humanities College- Isfahan University

Ali H. Al-Hakim, an Iraqi-born scholar, holds a 'cand.mag' from the University of Oslo. He studied Arabic literature in Iraq, and continued his classical theological studies reaching the level of Ijtihad. He has lectured at different academic centres in numerous European countries, such as the University of Oslo, Norway, University of Southampton, University of Isfahan and CETS Croydon in London. He has written and edited various works of different subjects in Norwegian, Arabic, English and German. His latest edited works is: 'A Perfect Governor'. He currently resides in London where he works as a lecturer in Islamic studies at the Islamic College, London. He is the head of the research department of (IJCA) the Islamic Jurisprudence Centre of A'ima Atthar – London.

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In the Name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful

The Martyr of Freedom

Vol. I

Mystical Concepts and Historical Analysis of
Al-Husayn (as) the Master of Martyrs
and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (saws)

BY

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In the Name of Allah, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful

'This work is absolutely brilliant and thought-provoking - I appreciate particularly the parallels of Islam to the spiritual tradition of another great spiritual nation, that of the Native Americans. The author is in my prayers for the vital work he does seeking unity of the Muslim Nation of People. I hope and pray that the results are fecund and effective in healing the terrible wounds that are an affront to God's Holy Word through the Qur'an. I address the author directly: Blessings, blessings, blessings be upon you, Ayatollah!'

James David Audlin, American author of 'The Circle of Life'

'It was the great sacrifice of Imam Hussain (as) which enabled Islam to endure and its values to enlighten the hearts and minds of freedom seekers throughout history. To uproot falsehood and reinstate the Qur'anic teaching in its original form were the objective and goals, which no one, other than the grandson of the Holy Prophet of Islam (sawas), was destined to undertake. In this volume of the work of 'Allamah Shaikh Ali H. Al-hakim, we read the answer to all the questions which have been troubling the Muslims regarding Imam Hussain (as) and his sacrifice.'

Dr. S. F. Milani, Professor of Islamic Jurisprudence, ICAS, London

'Many books have been written about Imam Hussain -the grandson of Islam's Prophet - and, since their authors are legitimately motivated by devotion to him, it is no criticism to remark of them that they are often repetitious. However, the present volume of the work, '*Martyr of Freedom*', by A. H.

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'Ali H. Al-Hakim's new book, "The Martyr of Freedom", is an original approach to the life and role of Imam al-Hussain (as) in Islam. In this part of the book, he has presented an analytical text of the historical factors that brought about the event of Karbala, itself a turning point in classifying truth from falsehood.
The present book reflects an anthology of spiritual experience, meticulously grafted with historical research, lived and breathed in spiritual essence with Imam al-Hussain (as) over the past twenty years; the fruits of which have cascaded to the author's disciples, in a series of lectures held in various parts of Europe and the United States.

While you journey through the book, you will witness certain historical events, starting with the meeting at the Hall of Banu Saa'idah, culminating in the tragedy that is Karbala. In the author's mind, Imam al-Hussain is the link between all these heartbreaking stations, which resulted in his martyrdom. Al-Hakim has successfully demonstrated the important notion that, due to the domination of the collective mind, unnoticed wrong action can lead, through accumulated dormant insubordination, to far greater sin, like the murder of Imam al-Hussain (as). I congratulate Al-Hakim for his latest work, wishing him every success throughout his sacred mission.'

Dr. Jassim Hussain, Professor of Islamic History, ICAS affiliated to the University of Middlesex, London

'The efforts of several years by his eminence the researcher Ayatollah Ali H. Al-hakim is worth praising and special gratitude, particularly his unique presentation and innovative manifestation of the revolution of Imam Hussain (as). This book is innovative, thought provoking and respresents unique values. Its distinctive and fascinating feature is its superb comparison of Imam Hussain's (as) goal with that of some of the Godly prophets, while introducing the historical and mystical characters of his personality, not to forget the book's captivating title.'

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Southampton, University of Isfahan and CETS Croydon in London. He has been invited to participate in many International conferences organized by equally prestigious universities such as the University of Utrecht, the University of Durham, the University of Manchester and the University of Bergen, Norway. He has written and edited various works of different subjects in Norwegian, Arabic, English and German. His latest edited work is: 'A Perfect Governor'. He currently resides in London where he works as a lecturer in Islamic studies at the Islamic College, London. He is the head of the research department of (IJCA) the Islamic Jurisprudence Centre of A'ima Atthar – London.

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INTRODUCTION

Imam Husayn (as), the third Imam according to the 'Twelver' Shi'ah doctrine, is the blessed son of Imam Ali (as) and Fatimah (as), and consequently the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (saws). For those who believe in freedom and justice, he will always be remembered as one of the greatest revolutionaries in history. The memory of his personality, and of the sacrifices he made, lives on in the hearts of the believers; an eternal flame. His message echoes through history, giving hope to the weak and oppressed of every age and time, and inspiring countless generations to resist tyranny at all costs. His exemplary character provides a perfect model of moral and ethical ideals, and his love for justice illuminates, for humanity, the path brought by his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad (saws). Al-Husayn was, is, and always will be, a bright light in what seems to be never-ending darkness, a glimmer of hope in a time overcome by despair; and his position within Islam has been made clear in the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions. The Prophet (saws) said about him:

Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn. ... Hasan and Husayn are the masters of the youth in Paradise; O Allah, I love them; so love everyone who loves them, and be an enemy to everyone who is an enemy to them.

It is a sad reality – especially in the present era – that many Muslims consider Imam Husayn (as) little more than a symbol of sorrow rather than an incentive for action. They prefer to shed tears over him rather than refer to him as a valuable source of knowledge, and a cause for studying the history of Islam. They see remembrance of him as a ritual, not a school for inspiration. They do not realize that in him we find a *complete* Islam! In writing this book, it is our

intention to reveal these aspects of his inspirational personality, both historically and from a mystical perspective. For many scholars, it seemed quite impossible to conceive of such a book that would launch these aspects into the intellectual field, which is why we have taken up the challenge. This book sets out to illustrate the lessons that every thinking human being (not only Muslim) can take from Imam Husayn's (as) character and from his sacrifice.

It is our intention to present all this in a modern and universal style. It is for this reason that the book comprises two volumes. The first chapter of the present volume is dedicated to analyzing the historical roots and critical factors which led to the tragedy which took place in Karbalah on the 10th of Muharram 61 A.H. [After-Hijrah, the Islamic Calendar], and the events that followed. Within this chapter, Al-Husayn (as) is examined as an historical figure, and the various factors that led him and his companions, directly or indirectly, to Karbalah are analyzed.

Secondly, we have endeavoured to explore and present the spiritual facet of Imam Husayn's (as) personality. It is unfortunate that, while so many people remember his name, so few are aware of his spiritually elevated position. Therefore, the second chapter of this book attempts to reveal his metaphysical aspect, and his revolution, through a comparison of his qualities with those of some of the holy prophets.

We hope that through these two chapters we are able to develop a comprehensive understanding of Al-Husayn (as) from both historical and spiritual perspectives. Our ultimate hope is to introduce the Master of Martyrs (as) as he was: an inspirational and truly universal personality, the likes of which are rarely witnessed throughout history.

Much of the material in this book was previously presented in lectures. Some of these were delivered in Arabic during the early 1990s, or in Norwegian, while the author taught Islamic history at the University of Oslo in 1997. The rest were delivered in English, on various occasions in London (England), and Atlanta, Georgia and Sacramento, California (United States), between 1999 and 2004. During this time, some of them were translated into English, while others were written down. The whole draft was then rewritten, restructured, supplemented, and edited before publication. It is the sincere hope of the author that the reader will enjoy reading this book as much as he has enjoyed writing it; and that through understanding Imam Husayn (as), and the values for which he sacrificed himself, all human beings will be able to realize his vision as a global reality.

Ali H. Al-Hakim
London

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I would like to acknowledge my sincere thanks to those who have supported me by writing their blurb as an introduction to the readers of the book, specifically 'Allamah Sayyed Dr. F. Milani, Prof. Hamid Algar, Prof. Jassim Hussain, Dr. A. A. Mutazul-Qai'm and Prof. Wilfred Madelong. Also I should acknowledge my thanks to: A. Helalian, M. R. Hussain, S. Hussain, M. H. Hussain, I. Khaleeli, S. Marhoon, A. Paine, M. Connors, M. El-Murad and many of my sincere students at *Hawzah Ilmiyyah* in London. In addition, I should pay special thanks to all members of my family and those who have contributed to making this dream a reality and the best outcome of such a huge challenge.

Chapter 1

A Historical Approach

Al-Husayn (as) was the second son of Imam Ali b. Abu Talib and Fatimah az-Zahra (as). He is known by the *kunya* of 'Abu Abdullah', and remembered as *Sayyid ush-Shuhada*; Master of the Martyrs. Born on the 3rd of Shaban in the fourth year after the Prophet's (saws) emigration to Madinah (4 A.H.), he was mercilessly slain on the 10th of Muharram 61 A.H. on the dusty plain of Karbalah, where his shrine stands today. His life can be divided into four sections:

1. Time spent in the era of the Prophet of Allah (saws) (nearly 6 years).
2. The time during the Imamate of his father, Ali (as) (approx 30 years).
3. The period of his brother, Imam Hasan's (as) Imamate (10 years).
4. The period of his own Imamate, which lasted for almost 10 years.

Imam Husayn (as) was known for his noble character, his vast knowledge, and his deep dedication to God. He was the best of his family after the demise of his brother. During his governorship of Yazid, these qualities were widely recognized by the people and even attested to by those who fought against him at Karbalah. one of Yazid's soldiers present at the battle wrote in his narrative that:

There were, with Al-Husayn, young men, unlike any other. ... Their men were the best of men, their youth were the best youths, their women were the best of women, and their children, the best children.

The events of Karbalah have often been considered – by Western scholars of Islam – as the culmination of a purely political struggle between different factions within the Muslim community of the time. However, a comprehensive evaluation of Al-Husayn (as), his revolution, and his followers, leads one to the conclusion that there was much more at work than mere political motivation. Ashurah was not only the uprising of a person or his supporters against a government, or an uprising confined to a political time, place, and set of circumstances. The revolution of Imam Husayn (as) was a struggle for all times and places – an insurgency against injustice, corruption, and hypocrisy, wherever and whenever they may occur.

Imam Husayn (as) has been described in a prophetic tradition as the 'Revenge of Allah', as the 'son of the Revenge of Allah' and as the 'one who was mercilessly slaughtered'. He is also known as the heir of the prophets and as the inheritor of the Prophet Muhammad (saws), Ali and Fatimah (as). Al-Husayn (as) was the embodiment of all the virtuous attributes; he was what we would call a 'true human being', who had realized his full potential and his responsibility in life. His character developed in the purified household of the Prophet (saws), and he bore within him many of the sublime characteristics found in the Messenger of God (saws), himself. In contrast, Yazid and his allies can be recognized as bearing the characteristics of oppressors and deceivers, of which their murder of Al-Husayn (as) on the fateful day of Ashurah is testimony.

When the soldiers of Yazid arrived to intercept Imam Husayn (as) on his way to Kufah they were tired and exhausted from the heat. Al-Husayn (as) gave them and their animals water to drink, and the narrative says that one of Yazid's soldiers, who arrived late, was given water from Imam Husayn's own hand. He narrated:

Imam Husayn (as) stood up and gave me water, personally, from the water-skin, until I'd had enough.

By contrast, on the day of *Ashurah*, Yazid's soldiers were forbidden to give even a single drop of water to the children of Imam Husayn (as), let alone to anyone else. Not even the smallest and most helpless members of Al-Husayn's (as) family were spared; his six-month-old son was shot with an arrow, while cradled in his father's arms, as the father pleaded with the soldiers to give some water to the child. The tents of the encampment were attacked, plundered, and set alight by the enemy. The women and children who had accompanied Al-Husayn (as) were assaulted, humiliated, and taken as captives to Kufah, in Iraq, and from there on to Damascus, in Syria (*Sham*). Imam Husayn (as) says in one of his statements:

O Allah, you know that we didn't do what we did for the sake of leadership, nor to seek to be rich; but solely to revive the dead institutions of Your message, and to provide safety for the oppressed amongst Your servants.[1]

The revolution of Imam Husayn (as) against the Ummayad regime lit a spark of life in a society that had been gripped and rendered feeble by apathy. The shock brought the sleeping body from its torpor. Yazid's intentions to distort Islam to suit his own decadent ends were exposed by Al-Husayn's sacrifice at Karbalah. We are indebted to Imam

Husayn (as), for, without him, the truth would have been lost at the hands of the tyrants. The purpose of his revolution was not political or material gain; rather, it was fundamentally intended to preserve the essence of the Islamic ideology, to protect the true understanding of the Qur'an and prophetic traditions, and to revive the willingness of Muslim society to stand against injustice and oppression. It has been narrated that Imam Husayn (as) said:

I did not revolt against him for the sake of any personal wish or desire, nor for being unjust or mischievous, but to revive the Islamic institutions of my grandfather the Prophet Muhammad (saws). I want to encourage the practice of goodness, to prevent evil-doing, and to follow the example of the Prophet (saws) and my father. [2]

And although he became a martyr on the day of *Ashurah*, Al-Husayn was successful. His murder sent tremors of agitation through the fabric of Muslim society; his sacrifice dispelled any misconceptions about the intentions of Yazid, and brought the true nature of the Umayyad regime into full view of the population, who were stirred and inspired to action. Yazid's government did not last for more than three years; he and his successors from Bani Umayyah, and later Bani Abbas, faced countless revolutions in the name of Al-Husayn. Karbalah became the symbol of the eternal struggle waged against tyranny, and the tragic imagery of *Ashurah* gave life to innumerable uprisings for the cause of justice. Al-Husayn became an institution through which the Muslim *Ummah* could rise up and fight against oppressors. Many examples of the revival of the Muslim *Ummah* can be found in recent events, and some that are still taking place today. Even now, Muslims have a duty to Imam Husayn (as) to perpetuate the spirit of resistance and freedom that he bequeathed to us when he laid down his life. However, this

is merely a glimpse of Imam Husayn's (as) all-encompassing spiritual qualities and his divinely presented position. Imam Husayn's tragedy in Karbalah must be studied as a historical precursor of present events, which occurred many years after the day of *Ashurah*. This may lead us to recognize the necessity for studying history and how we should study it.

The Significance of History

Anybody for whom two days of his life are identical is surely in a state of loss.[3]

Imam Ali (as)

In their teachings, the Imams (as) emphasized the importance of constantly reassessing ourselves: of analyzing our thoughts and our actions and examining every day of our lives, so that we may learn new lessons, and gain fresh insights from them, and in so doing bring ourselves closer to perfection, and prepare ourselves for the future. Regarding their words *Judge yourselves before you are judged*, we must approach this with honesty and sincerity, for although we can deceive others; by doing so we are only deluding ourselves. Moreover, even though we can delude ourselves, it is not possible for us to deceive the Lord, Who is the All-knowing and All-perceiving.

One dimension of this reflection that was discussed by the Imams (as) is history. Allah (swt) has said, in Surah Rum (the Romans, verse 9), *Do they not travel through the earth, and see what the end of those before them was?* History provides for us a wealth of lessons and knowledge, as it is the mirror of reality, a reflection of the past and one of the keys to mastering our future. People have always been proud of their history, and every nation extols and glorifies its previous achievements throughout the ages of humankind.

History began with the recording of information in ancient times, and has since developed into a science that is alive and immutably connected with the collective consciousness of the human race, its future and its ability to progress.

It reveals the character and the significance of different nations. The value of a society is to be weighed according to the importance it places upon its history, whether it derives any meaning or inspiration from its past, and whether this inspiration leads it towards the refinement of its ideas, an assessment and development of its direction, and ultimately a positive change in its reality and destiny. The success of societies in understanding their history is directly connected to the evolution of their beliefs and their development as nations. Thus, the fate of any society that disregards the importance of history is annihilation.

A Comprehensive Method of studying History: The Puzzle

The events of *Saqifah* and *Ashurah* have become central themes in Islamic history, particularly among the followers of the Shi'ah doctrine, who remember the first for its controversy and the second for its tragedy. However, these two instances do not historically exist independent or distinct from one another; rather, it can be said that a number of factors emerged from the first that ultimately led to the second. One injustice led – whether intentionally or otherwise – to another, and the series of injustices culminated in the tragedy of Karbalah. We cannot content ourselves with merely narrating the story of Al-Husayn (as) in its dramatically epic form. We must realize that there is a complicated array of historical facts that we must further investigate. We should realize that a number of very different elements, historical, political, religious, and social, brought a series of events into being. This necessitates the

employment of a method that will take into account the broad spectrum of subjects that affect this study; otherwise, we risk the disintegration of our examination into a blind acceptance of historical accounts and a narrow-minded or purely emotional perception of the past.

The historical factors that set up such a tragedy as *Ashurah* should be studied diachronically or explored within a panoptic view, within a framework that thoroughly analyzes the circumstances and events before the tragedy itself. Such a comprehensive method is the only one that can be considered in harmony with our Islamic interpretation of history, a rational and critical investigation that results in a conclusion acceptable to our intellect. Historical events are connected to one another in the same way as are the pieces of a puzzle; each piece is connected, in one way or another, to the whole puzzle, and until all the pieces are in place the larger picture will remain obscure or incomplete. A similar approach must be adopted when investigating any event or any of its significant historical implications.

A Norwegian proverb states *'Den ene løgnen drar den andre etter seg'*, which means that one lie ultimately leads to the one that follows it. It is in this way that we must perceive the incidents that followed the Prophet's (saws) demise, and it is through this direction that we should link the event of *Saqifah* with its consequential events. The best and most effective approach is to provide an example where everything is linked together. One form of connection is similar to that observed in domino pieces – when one falls, the others follow suit – a phenomenon known as an *inductive* connection. Another form can be understood in the example of a watch chain, which is inseparable when all the links are joined together, but if one or more links are removed, it falls apart; this is a *deductive* connection. In this case, we will

perceive the events following the Prophet's (saws) passing away under the first, inductive form of connection.

To summarize, there is a logical connection between historical events, which helps us to arrive at important conclusions about key instances in our history. In order to appreciate this, we must use a method that, while remaining within the framework of a particular period, will enable us to deal with unclear, though not undiscernible, pieces of information. Such a method of study is a thorough and comprehensive approach, and the one who follows this approach must remain clear and objective in his observations and the conclusions he draws from them. As with any historical study, the basis of our task should be a question of understanding *what exactly has happened.*

Studying the Historical Conditions

The death or martyrdom of al-Husayn was for a long time a problem for the conscience of devout Muslims. He was, after all, the grandson of the Prophet. For the Shi'ah its significance is much deeper. Al-Husayn serves in their eyes as a redemptive hero, who by his actions set an example to Muslims that should always be remembered. [4]

This is how a contemporary historian and Western scholar of Islamic history described the significance of Karbalah in the early period of the history of Islam. In this passage he refers to the collective conscience of all Muslims (whether Sunni or Shi'ah), none of whom have been able to reconcile the murder of the Prophet's (saws) grandson with any justifiable reason. Scholars from both sides have paid special attention to this event; take for example this narration contained in the works of Ahmed b. Hanbal, a well-known Sunni source:

Imam Ahmad relates that Anas ibn Malik said that the Angel of Rain asked to come to the Prophet (saws) and was allowed to do so.
The Prophet (saws) said to Um Salamah, 'Guard the door so that no one enters.'
Then came Husayn ibn Ali (as), he jumped until he managed to enter, he climbed on to the shoulders of the Prophet (saws).
The Angel asked the Prophet (saws), 'Do you love him?'
The Prophet (saws) said, 'Yes.'
The Angel said, 'Your Ummah will kill him and if you so wish, I will show you where he will be killed.'
He said the Angel clapped his hands and showed the Prophet (saws) red sand.
He said, 'Um Salamah then took the sand and wrapped it in a piece of cloth.'
He said, 'We used to hear that he would be killed at Karbalah.'[5]

This narration in particular emphasizes the magnitude of what happened on the plains of Karbalah only some sixty years after the Prophet's (saws) death. Ashurah was more than a passing event in history; it was in fact an issue of divine revelation. It is this which obliges us to study the critical conditions surrounding it, including those ideological standards of the different groups involved, without which a complete and accurate historical appreciation is not possible.

Shi'ah believe that the Imamate constitutes a spiritual and political extension of the prophethood. The Imam is the one who – after the demise of the Prophet – serves as an authority and source of knowledge for the Muslims in the ordinances and principles of their religion. He is the one who must provide guidance about new emergent issues for which no precedent can be found in the Qur'an or Sunnah. His teachings are decisive criteria for guidance, and hence

such a person must be free of all faults in his intellect and character.[6] The Imam is completely free from sin and fallibility; his existence is a source of pride to the Muslims, of anger to the hypocrites, of perdition to the unbelievers. The Imam is unique in his age in the sense that no one can attain his rank. No scholar can come within range of his knowledge, and he is unequalled in all his qualities. He possesses all virtues and worthy attributes without any striving on his part, and he is adorned with all lofty characteristics. This is a great gift bestowed on him by God in His Generosity.[7]

Shi'ah also believe that the Prophet (saws) informed his *Ummah* regarding the 12 infallible Imams who were his successors, and said that all of them were from his household. The twelve Imams are Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as), his two sons (Hasan and Al-Husayn), and nine Imams of his progeny including Al-Mahdi. The Sunni hadith collections of Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim affirm that the Prophet (saws) said the abovementioned statement. We can also read in our Hadith compilation the following:

This authority will not cease to be until there are twelve caliphs, all of them from the Quraysh.[8]

Another version from the collection of Allamah Majlesi relates this text from the narrator Salman:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (saws) saying: "The order will be firm until twelve Caliphs rule and all the people will gather under them.[9]

Al-Bukhari relates that Mu'awiyah ibn Abu Sufyan heard the Prophet (saws) saying:

The twelve Caliphs are from the Quraysh.[10]

Imam Husayn (as) is the third Imam according to the Shi'ah, and the last of the five purified people referred to as *ashab ul-kisa*. There are many books written about his life, of which the majority are dedicated to his martyrdom. Arabic historians during the period with which we are dealing used to favour the recording of someone's death; therefore, there are many books about the death of Al-Husayn (as). These sources are referred to as *maqtal*, and if we wish to understand the circumstances of the event, then we must make a comparative analysis of the facts presented in these books and come to a conclusion about which is the most accurate account.[11]

The Sources on Imam Husayn's Death

There have been many *maqtal* written for Imam Husayn (as), but amongst the most famous, detailed, and historically accurate is that of Abu Mikhnaf. His account of Al-Husayn's journey to Kufah, as reported by at-Tabari, provides us with the most comprehensive account of his important speeches and letters. These are particularly significant because of the arguments that Al-Husayn (as) asserts concerning himself and the Imamate, which are clearly of a Shi'ah character. This suggests that there had been prior descriptions of events from a Shi'ah perspective before Abu Mikhnaf wrote his account.[12]

However, there is another category of historical writing regarding Al-Husayn (as) which emerges in the account of Ibn A'tham al-Kufi and al-Khawarazmi. One of the leading Western experts in Shi'ah history wrote the following description of this contribution:

This is hagiographical literature with the feats and exploits of al-Husayn exaggerated to the point of almost miraculous actions. Similar hagiographical writing is found in the clearly forged work that was attributed to Abu Mikhnaf. This tradition is continued in Maqtal al-Husayn by al-Khawarazmi. Here, he generally uses Ibn A'tham's account and provides interpretations, explanations, and supplements. [13]

He later adds:

Despite these comments on Tabari's version of the death of al-Husayn, we owe to him the fact that we have the most detailed version of the narrative available to us in his report of Ibn al-Kalbi's recension of Abu Mikhnaf's work. The space given to this event, which in terms of political history was a failed revolution, emphasizes the importance of the event for Muslims in general, and the Shi'ah in particular. [14]

The Detailed Story as narrated by the Historians

At-Tabari recorded the details of Imam Husayn's (as) martyrdom in these words:

Ammar al-Duhni reported that he asked Abu Ja'far to tell him about the killing of al-Husayn so that he might think that he was present at al-Husayn's death. Abu Ja'far reported that Mu'awiyah had died while al-Walid b. 'Utbah b. Abi Sufyan was governor of Madinah. He sent to al-Husayn b. Ali asking for his oath of allegiance. Al-Husayn asked him to grant him a delay and to show favour to him. He granted him a delay, and al-Husayn left for Mecca. The Kufans and their messengers came to him, saying, 'We have kept ourselves exclusively for you. We do not attend the Friday prayer with the governor, so come to us.' Al-Nu'man b. Bashir al-Ansari was governor of al-Kufah.

Al-Husayn sent for Muslim b. 'Aqil b. Abi Talib, his cousin, and told him, 'Go to al-Kufah and investigate what they have written to me. If it is true, we will go to them.' Muslim departed to Madinah. He took two guides, who went with him into the desert. They were overcome by thirst, and one of the two guides died. Muslim wrote to al-Husayn asking him to relieve him, but al-Husayn wrote back to him telling him to go on to al-Kufah. He continued his journey until he arrived. He stayed with one of the inhabitants called Ibn 'Awsajah. When news of his arrival was circulated among the Kufans, they streamed to him to give the oath of allegiance. Twelve thousand of them gave the oath of allegiance to him. One of the men who favoured Yazid b. Mu'awiyah stood up before al-Nu'man b. Bashir and told him, 'You are either a weak man or you are acting like a weak man. The town has been corrupted.' Al-Nu'man answered, 'I would prefer to be a weak man in obedience to God than a strong man in disobedience of God. I would not tear off a cover that God has spread.'[15]

After the death of Mu'awiyah b. Abu Sufyan, there were two personalities who presented a credible threat to the leadership of his son, Yazid. Abdullah b. al-Zubayr and Al-Husayn b. Ali – both of whom had refused to pledge allegiance to the Ummayad regime – benefitted from considerable support amongst the Muslim community. A leading Western expert on Islamic history analysed the conditions as follows:

These two men, al-Husayn b. Ali b. Abi Talib and 'Abdallah b. al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwam, represent two of the most influential Islamic families. They are the sons of two great Islamic leaders and they oppose Yazid's succession. Thus, the central question involved in the caliphate of Yazid is the constitutional question of succession.[16]

It is unanimously agreed that Yazid was anxious to obtain allegiance from Al-Husayn, Ibn Zubayr, and Ibn 'Umar;

although Dinawari adds Abd al-Rahman b. Abu Bakr, this is obviously inaccurate, because the latter was, by that time, already dead. Evidently, the former three were leading members of the Muslim community, and, as they were sons of famous fathers, Yazid would naturally have wanted their support. However, there may be more to it even than that. According to both Baladhuri and Ibn A'tham (though Tabari does not mention this), Mu'awiyah had agreed, in his treaty with Imam Hasan (as), that there should be a council (*shura*) to decide the succession after him. This institution of consultation had been introduced by 'Umar b. Al-Khattab for his own succession; the six leading members of the Muslim community chose one of their number as Caliph. Al-Husayn, Ibn al-Zubayr, and Ibn 'Umar would have naturally been expected to be among this group, and it is equally certain that they would not have chosen Yazid. Yazid's intention was to pre-empt the *shura* by obtaining the oaths of allegiance of these men before any consultation could take place![17]

Al-Tabari states the following about Yazid's concern:

Yazid's only concern, when he assumed power, was to receive the oath of allegiance from the individuals who had refused to agree with Mu'awiyah's demand for this oath of allegiance to Yazid. Mu'awiyah had summoned the people to give an oath of allegiance to him that Yazid would be his heir.

Yazid's concern was to bring their attitude to an end. Therefore, he wrote to al-Walid: 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, from Yazid, commander of the faithful, to Walid b. 'Utbah.... Mu'awiyah was one of the servants of God, whom God had blessed, appointed to authority, and given power and ability. He lived for a measured time and died at an appointed time. May God have mercy on him, for he lived as a praiseworthy man and died as a pious,

God-fearing man. Peace be with you.' He wrote to him on another parchment as small as a rat's ear: 'Seize Al-Husayn, Abdullah b. 'Umar, and 'Abdullah b. al-Zubayr to give the oath of allegiance. Act so fiercely that they have no chance to do anything before giving the oath of allegiance. Peace be with you.' [18]

Yazid was obviously concerned about the Kufan's inclination towards Al-Husayn and it seems likely that he was aware of the communications and invitations, which they had sent to the Imam (as). Letters from the supporters of Al-Husayn (as) continued to arrive, each author repeating the same plea: 'Now we have no leader. Therefore come; through you may Allah unite us under truth and guidance.' Still in other letters, they appealed to him: 'People are waiting for you', and for his part, Al-Husayn (as) wrote to the Kufan people and called upon them to close their ranks and remain true to their word. The household of the Prophet (saws) were already well acquainted with the wavering support from the Kufans, who had in the past deserted Imam Ali (as) and his son Imam Hasan (as).[19] Despite this, the political instability of Iraq posed a serious problem for Yazid, who, no doubt, realized that the situation had the potential to develop into a full revolution against his authority if left unchecked. He wanted a way to avert this possibility. At-Tabari narrates the following:

Yazid, he summoned a mawla of his called Sarjun, who used to advise him, and gave him the news. Sarjun asked whether he would accept the advice of Mu'awiyah if he were alive. When he agreed, Sarjun said, 'Then accept it from me. The only man for al-Kufah is 'Ubaydallah b. Ziyad. Give him authority over the city.' Yazid had been very angry with 'Ubayadallah b. Ziyad; he had been intending to dismiss him from al-Basrah. Yet now he wrote to him expressing satisfaction with him; he

gave him authority over al-Kufah together with al-Basrah. He also wrote to him to hunt for Muslim b. 'Aqil and to kill him if he found him. 'Ubaydallah approached with some of the nobles of the people of al-Basrah. He entered al-Kufah veiled; every group of people whom he passed and greeted said, 'Greetings, son of the daughter of the Apostle of God,' for they thought that he was al-Husayn b. Ali. When 'Ubaydallah reached the palace, he summoned a mawla of his, gave him three thousand dirhams, and told him, 'Go and ask about his man to whom the Kufans are giving their oath of allegiance. Let it be known that you are a man from His people who has come for this purpose and that you give him this money in order to strengthen his position.' The mawla kept on being generous and helpful until he was led to a shaykh among the Kufans, who was in charge of receiving the oath of allegiance. He met him and told him his story. The shaykh said to him, 'Your meeting both pleases and grieves me. What pleases me is the way God has guided you, but what grieves me is the fact that our plans are not yet properly established.' The shaykh introduced him to Muslim, who took the money from him and received his oath of allegiance. Then he returned to 'Ubaydallah and gave him the information.

On 'Ubaydallah's arrival, Muslim had moved from the house in which he had been staying to the house of Hani' b. 'Urwah al-Muradi. Muslim b. 'Aqil had written to al-Husayn b. Ali, informing him of the oath of allegiance made by twelve thousand of the Kufans and advising him to come.[20]

At-Tabari also records that Muslim b. A'qil wrote a letter to Imam Husayn (as) informing him of about eighteen thousand supporters who had given their allegiance. He summarized the conditions of Kufah, Iraq:

When Muslim b. 'Aqil had moved to Hani' b. 'Urwah's house and eighteen thousand had given the oath of allegiance to him, he had sent a letter to Al-Husayn with 'Abis b. Abi Shabib al-Shakiri: 'The trusted

early messenger does not lie to his own people. Eighteen thousand of Kufans have given the oath of allegiance to you. Hurry and come when my letter reaches you. All the people are with you. None of them has any regard or desire for the clan of Mu'awiyah. Peace be with you.'
Muhammad b. al-Ash'ath went with Ibn 'Aqil to the door of the palace. He asked permission to enter. Permission was given to him. He gave a report to 'Ubaydallah about Ibn 'Aqil and Bukayr's blow against him. 'Ubaydallah said, 'May God destroy him.'
Then Muhammad b. al-Ash'ath told him about what he had done and about his own guarantee of safe-conduct or to him. 'Ubaydallah said, 'What have you to do with a guarantee of safe-conduct? As if we sent you to guarantee him safe-conduct when we only sent you to bring him!' Ibn al-Ash'ath fell silent.
Ibn 'Aqil came to the door of the palace and he was thirsty. At the palace door there were people sitting waiting for permission to enter. Among them were 'Umarah b. 'Uqbah b. Abi Mu'ayt, 'Amr b. Hurayth, Muslim b. 'Amr and Kathir b. Shihab.' [21]

At-Tabari adds:

Hani' b. 'Urwah fell ill, and 'Ubaydallah came on a sick visit to him. 'Umarah b. 'Ubayd al-Saluli told Hani', '[The purpose of] our group and our planning is to kill this despot. Now God has given you power over him, so kill him.' Hani' replied, 'I would not like him to be killed in my house.' So 'Ubaydallah left [unharmed].
Only a week later, Sharik b. A'war fell sick. He was held in great regard by Ibn Ziyad and other governors; yet he was a steadfast Shi'ite. 'Ubaydallah sent to him that he should come to him in the evening. Sharik said to Muslim, 'This reprobate is going to pay me a sick visit in the evening. When he is sitting down, come out against him and kill him. Then go and take his place in the palace, for no one will prevent you. If I recover from the pain during the next few days, I will go to al-Basra and I will be able take control of it on your behalf.'

In the evening, 'Ubaydallah set off to pay Sharik a sick visit. Muslim b. 'Aqil had taken up a strategic position in order that he could enter. Sharik had said, 'Don't let him escape you when he sits down. Hani' b. 'Urwah rose and told Muslim b. 'Aqil, 'I don't want him to be killed in my house,' as if he loathed that idea. Ibn Ziyad arrived and came in and sat down. He asked Sharik about his illness, 'What is it that you seem [to have] and when did you feel ill?' After Sharik had spent a long time in answering him and he still saw that Muslim had not come out, he became afraid that Ibn Ziyad would escape and he began to recite:

What are you waiting for to greet Salma?
Quench my thirst [with a sip of water], even though my life is in that.

He repeated that twice or three times.
'Ubaydallah remarked, without discovering his real situation, 'Have you noticed that he is talking deliriously?' Hani' replied, 'Yes, may God make you prosperous. This behaviour has been going from early this morning, when it was still dark, until now.'
Ibn Ziyad rose and departed. Then Muslim came out. Sharik demanded, 'What stopped you from killing him?' He replied, 'Two things. One of them was Hani's dislike for him to be killed in his house. The other was a tradition that the people tell on the authority of the Prophet. "Faith controls killing and a believer should not commit murder."' Hani' said, 'By God! If you had killed him, you would have killed a grave sinner (fasiq), a profligate [fajir], and an unbeliever (Kafir). Yet I disliked the idea of his being killed in my house.'
Sharik only lingered on for three nights after that, and then he died.' [22]

Al-Husayn (as) was by now aware of the dangerous situation in Madinah. In order to move to a more secure location, he decided to depart for Mecca, which, because of the Hajj season, meant that it was an excellent opportunity

to assess the political conditions in the *Ummah*, while allowing him to buy time and perform his religious duty of the *Hajj* before he left for Kufah. The desert sands through which Al-Husayn and his caravan travelled were very hot beneath the heat of the blazing sun. He was following in the footsteps of his father, Ali b. Abu Talib, who had led the caravan of the four Fatimahs, and in doing so had challenged the pride of the Quraysh. Al-Husayn was, contrary to the custom of his time, marching in the daytime; which both illustrates the urgency of his journey, and the vibrancy of his soul. The heart of that undaunted hero beat like a mountainous drum within him.[23]

Many Muslims saw the arrival of Al-Husayn (as) in Mecca as an omen of coming victory. Likewise, political gatherings were organized in which the situation was analyzed. By staying in Mecca, Al-Husayn (as) aimed to:

1. Agitate public opinion and assess the majority's attitude towards the steps that were to be taken by him.
2. Analyse the political situation in light of Islamic principles concerning rule and legitimacy of leadership.
3. Make preparations to instigate a revolution against the Ummayad authorities.
4. Accelerate the challenge and announce the downfall of Yazid's regime, in order to establish a rightly guided state under the leadership of the Imam. This state was to be based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Islamic principles.[24]

When he became aware of Al-Husayn's presence in Mecca, Yazid ordered his governor there to capture or, if necessary, kill him, even if he was in *ihram* and performing *tawaf* around the Ka'ba. Imam Husayn (as) knew that the Ummayad authorities would not hesitate to carry out this action, and as he was unwilling to allow the sanctity of the Ka'ba to be

violated, therefore he changed his intention from that of *Hajj* to *Umrah* (the shorter pilgrimage) before setting out towards Iraq to join his supporters in Kufah. At the same time, Ibn Ziyad, Yazid's new governor, was exerting himself to regain control of the situation in Kufah. At-Tabari narrated the details:

A long time passed for Ibn Ziyad. He did not hear the supporters of Ibn 'Aqil as he had heard them before. He told his followers to look down at the people and see whether they could see any of them. They looked down and did not see anyone. Then he told them to see whether the people were in the shadows, lying in ambush for them. Ibn Ziyad's followers ascended the central parts [of the walls] of the mosque; they lowered the torches of fire in their hands, so that they could see whether there was anyone in the shadows. Sometimes the torches gave enough light and sometimes they did not give as much light as the followers would have wished. They let down the torches and sticks of cane tied with ropes that were set on fire. They were lowered until they reached the ground. They did this in [the place of] the deepest darkness, as well as those parts that were closer and those that were in between. They also did that in the darkness around the pulpit. When they saw that there was nothing in the shadows, they informed Ibn Ziyad. Then he opened the doorway into the mosque. He came out and ascended the pulpit. His followers also came out with him. He told them to sit around him for a little while before the night prayer. He ordered 'Amr b. Nafi' to call out that there would only be a guarantee of safe-conduct for any man of the police, the 'arifs, the supporters, and the fighters who prayed the night prayer in the mosque. Not an hour passed before the mosque was full of people. After ordering his caller [to call for prayer], he began the prayer. Al-Husayn b. Tamim said to him 'Either you pray with the people or someone else should pray with them while you go into the palace and pray there. This is up to you. I am afraid you will not be secure here against any of your enemies trying to assassinate you.' 'Ubaydallah told him, 'Order my guard to

stand behind me just as they used to do and go round among them. I am not going inside.'

After praying with the people, he stood up. He praised and glorified God, saying: 'Ibn 'Aqil, stupid and ignorant man as he is, has attempted the opposition and rebellion that you have seen. There will be no security from God for any man in whose house we find him. Whoever brings him will have the reward for his blood. Fear God, you servants of God, and keep to obedience and your oath of allegiance. Do not do anything against yourselves. Husayn b. Tamim, may your mother lose you if any of the gates of the lanes of al-Kufah are open, or this man gets away, and you do not bring him to me. I give you authority over the houses of the inhabitants of al-Kufah. Send lookouts to the entrances of the lanes. Tomorrow morning clear the people from the houses. Search their houses thoroughly so that you can bring me this man.[25]

Ibn Ziyad was determined to capture Muslim b. A'qil, succeeding at last after b. A'qil had been abandoned by his followers; alone and disheartened. At-Tabari reports the following in his book:

Muslim was taken in to Ibn Ziyad; however, he did not greet him as governor. The guard demanded, 'Don't you greet the governor?' He replied, 'If he wants my death, what is the point of my greeting him with words of peace? If he did not want my death, my greetings of peace to him would be profuse.' Ibn Ziyad said, 'By my life! You will be killed.' Muslim said, 'Is it so?' He replied that, indeed, it was. Then Muslim asked if he could make his will to one of his fellow tribesmen. Ibn Ziyad agreed.

Muslim looked at those sitting with 'Ubaydallah. Among them was 'Umar b. Sa'd (b. Abi Waqqas). He said to him, "Umar, there is kinship between you and me and I have a need that you could carry out successfully. But it is secret.' 'Umar refused to let him say anything. However, 'Ubaydallah told him not to refuse to consider the need of his

cousin. So 'Umar got up with him and sat where Ibn Ziyad could watch him. Muslim said, 'I have a debt in al-Kufah. I borrowed seven hundred dirhams when I came to al-Kufah. Pay it for me. Take care of my corpse. Ask Ibn Ziyad to give it to you and then bury my body. Send someone to Al-Husayn to tell him to return, for I have written to him telling him that the people are with him and now I can only think that he is coming.'[26]

Muslim b. A'qil was executed by Ibn Ziyad's guards, but news of the developments in Kufah would not reach Imam Husayn (as) until it was too late. He proceeded on his way to Iraq, and although he was warned by many other travellers that the people of Kufah were unreliable and untrustworthy, Al-Husayn replied to them that God wanted him to become a martyr and for his family to be oppressed and taken into captivity. However, we must consider whether this was predestination or prediction. Did God will these events to happen (as Yazid himself would argue) or was a human factor involved? This must be the central element of our discussion: Why was Al-Husayn killed?

There is a proverb which says 'The truth hurts', and the circumstances which Muslim b. A'qil had to face in Kufah were certainly difficult to bear. He was witnessing the Kufan's betrayal of Imam Husayn (as) who, even as events unfolded, was coming in response to the invitation of the same people who would kill him, and yet Ibn A'qil could find no way to warn him. There was only one hope which was – ironically – in the person of 'Umar b. Sa'ad, the man who would lead the army against Al-Husayn on the plains of Karbalah. It was an Arabic custom that a relative of a dying person fulfils his final wishes, and that these are kept secret. Therefore, it is a telling statement of character that Ibn Sa'ad refused the request of Muslim b. A'qil and, no doubt, alerted Ibn Ziyad to it. However, this was the only option that

remained for Ibn A'qil, and perhaps it was only for the sake of the history books that he resorted to it.

Before the Prophet's (saws) Departure

Looking back at the events that occurred before the demise of the Prophet (saws), it is obvious that the *Ahlul Bayt*, especially Imam Ali (as), enjoyed a special relationship with him, which led to their elevated position in Islam and Islamic society. The distinguished status of the *Ahlul Bayt* has often been paralleled to the positions that families of previous prophets, similarly, benefited from.[27] For example, the purity that characterized the family of Muhammad can be compared to the quality of the family of Lot, who God described in the Qur'an as 'those who kept themselves pure' (*yatatahharun*). There are many instances in which this eminent station was made manifest during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (saws). The incident of *mubahala* is one such example. In the verse of *mubahala, which* was revealed concerning this event, the Prophet is addressed:

If anyone dispute with you in this matter [concerning Jesus] after the knowledge which has come to you, say: Come let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then let us swear an oath and place the curse of God on those who lie. (Qur'an 3: 61)

Commentators on the Qur'an are almost unanimous that this revelation was sent down regarding the visit of a delegation of Christians from Najran in the tenth year after Hijrah (631-2 CE). They did not accept the Islamic doctrine that opposed the notion of Jesus as the son of God and in the course of their debate with the Prophet (saws), this verse came as an invitation to a spiritual contest. Some modern scholars and Orientalists have critically noted a certain

tendency of the commentators to relate many Qur'anic passages concerning Christians to this visit.[28] But the question which everyone must ask is: Who is meant by 'our sons' and 'our women' on the part of the Prophet (saws)?

The Christians consented to participate in this mutual imprecation, and the next morning they found the Prophet (saws) with his grandsons, Hasan and Al-Husayn, his woman, Fatimah, and his nephew, Ali, whom he likened to himself. When the leader of the Christian delegation saw them, he exclaimed, 'By God, I see the faces which, if they were pray to God for mountains to move from their places, the mountains would immediately move! O believers in Jesus of Nazareth, I will tell you the truth that should you fail to enter into some agreement with Muhammad and if these souls, whom Muhammad has brought with him, curse you, you will be wiped out of existence to the last day of the life of the earth!'[29]

And so the Christians of Najran conceded. However, what is most significant about this verse is that the Prophet (saws) had enough faith in the purity and spiritual position of his family to place the whole future of Islam upon their invocation. The *mubahala*, according to reports, did not take place, since the Christians excused themselves from it. But the majority of Sunni sources quoted by al-Tabari do not identify the members of the Prophet's family who were present. Although some mention Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn, and some agree with the Shi'ah tradition that the *ahl al-kisa'* (the people of the cloak), including Ali, were assembled on this occasion. Irrespective of the circumstances, there does not seem to be a plausible alternative to the identification of the 'sons' in the verse with the two grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad (saws)

and, in that case, the inclusion of their parents, Ali and Fatimah, would be reasonable.

Also, Imam Ali (as) is known amongst Muslims for possessing the high rank of the very close companions. He said, describing himself, 'No one but the Messenger of Allah (saws) took me as the leader in prayers.'

Since in this matter a great many witnesses and a great deal of evidence exists, there is, consequently, no room for doubt in the minds of equitable people. It is reported, concerning Imam Ali's embrace of Islam, that he was invited by the Messenger (saws) to accept Islam. This indicates the Imam's mental maturity since his early childhood. The famous historian Al-Mas'udi wrote: 'Some said that the Imam was not old enough at the time of his embrace of Islam, so he was only an infant in that time.'

The Prophet (saws) understood the value of devoted companions, and when there is an abundance of evidence to indicate the dedication and sacrifices made by the Imam for the sake of Islam, how could the Prophet (saws) consider him like the others? This is illustrated in the number of the Prophet's (saws) remarks about the Imam's features and characteristics, which were intended to convey his spiritual position to the people.

These are the volumes available to us in reliable sources of history and hadith under the title of Imam Ali's virtues. In the second century of Islam, when the books of hadith were compiled, the compilers and narrators of the traditions were often influenced by the tendencies of the Ummayad supporters, who were intolerant of anyone expressing the virtues of Imam Ali (as) or the *Ahlul Bayt*. Some of the virtues that were ascribed to Caliphs were, in essence, the Imam's qualities, although these distortions meant that the same

narrators could be considered reliable sources to pass on what they knew about Ali (as). The narrators of Kufah in particular played a significant role in keeping these virtues alive. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal said, 'Ali is the one for whom a great deal of true virtues are spoken.' Among these virtues, there are some narrations about whose authenticity there is no doubt. The significance of some of them is so strong that, through them, the Imam's personality can be perceived through the eyes of the Messenger of Allah (saws). Abu Sa'id Khudri said:

كان لعلي من النبي (ص) دخلة ليست لأحد وكان للنبي (ص) من علي دخلة ليست لأحد غيره فكانت دخلة النبي (ص) من علي ان النبي (ص) كان يدخل عليهم كل يوم

No one met the Prophet (saws) more than Ali, so (also) did the Prophet (saws) (meet him). The Prophet's (saws) meeting was to come up to them every day.

Also Zayd Ibn Thabit said to Imam Ali (as):

انت من رسول الله (ص) بالمكان الذي لا يعدله احد

No one has the same dignity as you in front of the Messenger (saws).

These words were said by Zayd while he tenaciously supported 'Uthman. The Imam knew the Prophet (saws) like none of the other companions did. One piece of evidence indicating the Prophet's (saws) respect and trust for the Imam was that he gave him the hand of his daughter Fatimah (as), the best of all women, in marriage. Abu Bakr and 'Umar had already proposed to Fatimah but had been rejected by the Prophet (saws). However, when the Imam (as) asked to marry her, saying, 'I am not a deceiver', the Prophet (saws) replied, 'Fatimah is yours.' [30]

Imam Ali (as) wrote in a letter:

وانا من رسول الله كالصنو والذراع من العضد

My relation with the Messenger (saws) is that of one branch with another or of the wrist with the arm.

He said:

I followed the Messenger (saws) just as a baby camel follows its mother.

And he said:

إني لم أرد على الله ولا على رسوله ساعة قطّ

I never disobeyed God or his Messenger at all.

Concerning the declaration of exoneration, God told His Messenger: 'This message must be delivered either by you or someone on your behalf', which is why he made Abu Bakr return in the middle of his journey, and gave the message to Imam Ali, instead, so that it might be read on the 'Greater Pilgrimage'.[31] These occasions – amongst others – reflect the high position of the Prophet's household (as) and their respected standpoint. One of the modern Western historians concluded:

The Qur'an thus accorded the Ahlul Bayt of Muhammad an elevated position above the rest of the faithful, similar to the position of the families of the earlier prophets. God desired to purify them from all defilement. Certainly the renegades of the Prophet's family who opposed his mission were excluded from the divine grace, just like the renegades among the families of the past prophets.[32]

As the representative of God and the conveyer of the revelation, the Prophet (saws) had to ensure that his successor would uphold and dignify Islam after his demise. During his last days, he foresaw a movement that intended to prevent Imam Ali's (as) ascension to a position of leadership over the new Islamic nation. For this reason, he made two essential decisions:

1. He declared in public that Imam Ali (as) was his rightful successor in Ghadir Khum.
2. He took a practical step and ordered a special matter. On the 18th Safar 11 A.H., the Prophet (saws) handed to Osama b. Zayd, an 18-year-old youth, the leadership of an army, and sent him on an expedition. While appointing Osama for that army to fight the Romans, he ordered the most distinguished figures of his companions to be amongst the army under the leadership of Osama.

One of the contemporary scholars has analyzed the conditions regarding the first event and its aftermath in the following:

Each of those 120 thousand individuals should have retained the sermon of Ghadir, for carrying literally to their families, relatives, and friends. But, owing to the sensitive atmosphere created by the ruling authorities in the Islamic society just after the decease of the Prophet (s), people gradually forgot that momentous speech. Since relating events and notification of Ghadir and that declaration of fealty should have resulted in abdication of the usurpers of leadership, and that they should have never permitted such a thing, it was natural for them to spare no efforts for covering up that incident.[33]

The second step the Prophet (saws) had taken to ensure Ali's leadership was met with open disobedience. Even

though the companions were repeatedly ordered by the Prophet (saws) to join Osama's army, they lingered near Madinah. Furious at their disobedience, the Prophet (saws), with the help of Ali, ascended the pulpit, and demanded them to expedite. He said, 'Osama's Army must leave at once. May Allah curse those men who do not go with him.' [34]

It is not surprising that they were the same people who might have pretended to have accepted Imam Ali (as) outwardly, but inwardly rejected his right to be the successor after the Prophet (saws). They, again, disobeyed the second practical order. Muhammad Baqir Ansari writes the following in his book *What happened in Ghadir*:

The most noticeable thing is the fact that the persons who preceded others in declaring fealty to Ali were the same who took initiative in breaking their swearing of allegiance and breaching their pledge when they stood against him immediately after the Prophet's (saws) decease.[35]

Also, Ayatollah M. Baqir As-Sadr in his book *Fadak in History* writes:

The opinion of the Shi'ah about why the Prophet (saws) sent Osama with that army was clear. It was because the Prophet (saws) felt that there was an agreement between some of his companions on a certain thing, which would make them a front of opposition to Ali. [36]

These incidents make clear to us that many of the people who did not approve of the directions of the Prophet (saws) and opposed his support for Imam Ali (as) were the same ones who would stand against Ali after his death. Of course, we cannot generalize and say that there was something premeditated about their actions; rather, we can merely observe that they all adopted the same stance of hostility

towards Ali (as). It is probable that the Prophet (saws) foresaw that this situation would come about after his departure. He described the conditions, as put in his own words:

O People! 'Believe in Allah and His Apostle and the illumination revealed to him, otherwise we shall disfeature faces and turn them upside down, or curse them like the curse of the Sabbath people.' By Allah, the intended in this verse is none but a group of my companions whose names and lineage I do not recognize. But I have been given the order of overlooking them.[37]

He also said:

After me, kingship and usurpation shall substitute this Imamate.[38]

Allamah Sayyid Murtada 'Askari provides in his book *The Role of 'Aiy'shah in the History of Islam* a similar conclusion about the conditions:

Where the Prophet speaks of the future and unveils occurrences, he describes his companions after his demise as follows: some of them will proceed worthily in the way of God, while some others will deviate; a number will rise up against justice, while others will resort to mutiny and injustice.[39]

We can easily understand the Prophet's (saws) predictions for the *Ummah* after his death. Some would follow the right path and the rest would go astray. Thus, he knew and was fully aware of the attitude of these individuals while observing them during his lifetime. In fact, the revelations and prophecies given to him by Allah's messenger, Gabriel, reinforced his vision about the tragic incidents following his death.

The Link of Various Historical Incidents

Your father and I knew the virtue of ibn Abu Talib and his right that we had to regard and accept. When Allah chose for his Prophet what He had, carried out His promise, spread His mission and cleared His evidence then He raised his (the Prophet's) soul to the better world, your father and 'Umar were the first, who exhorted his (Ali's) right and opposed his claim. On that they agreed and became consistent. Then they asked him to pay homage to them but he did not respond to them so they intended to force him to by any means even the worst of it. [40]

This is from a letter that Mu'awiyah addressed to Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr concerning the early usurpation of Ali's (as) right by Abu Bakr and 'Umar. Mu'awiyah emphasized a weak point of his addressee's personal circumstances. Also, we notice that Mu'awiyah added that Abu Bakr and 'Umar demanded that Imam Ali (as) pay allegiance to them. 'Then they agreed...and became consistent' to show that their movement was planned previously and the agreement on the caliphate preceded their political actions on that day.[41] This letter was written as a response to a previous letter by Muhammad bin Abu Bakr sent to Mu'awiyah, during the time of the clash between Mu'awiyah and Imam Ali (as). It should lead every intelligent reader directly to the early days after the Prophet's (saws) death. After all, what does Mu'awiyah mean by these accusations?

Sociologists have unanimously agreed that big social changes can only occur in gradual progression. This fact applies to all kinds of social change and must therefore relate to any form of deviation from and/or guidance to the right path. A quest of a society towards perfection or deviation from the correct teaching are, again, other forms of social change. One cannot expect a journey towards

perfection or corruption to take only a few days or a short period of time. It was a considerable task for the Prophet (saws) to alter a whole society's moral values from those of a pre-Islamic polytheistic community to a totally different one with modified Islamic values and a new socio-ethical order. And taking into consideration the incident of Ashurah – including the cruel murder of the Prophet's (saws) grandson and all the male members of his family, and before this, leaving them, including his few-months-old baby to the sufferings of intense dehydration, and killing this baby only because his father entreated them for a small amount of water for him, and then taking captive the Prophet's family, including the women, and treating them as though they were disbelievers – while it was a terrible crime and will remain an unforgettable and unforgivable offence, it also reflects a state of very serious social disorder, which could never have emerged in such a limited period of time as that between Yazid's rise to power and the day of Ashurah. There must be a more panoptic analysis of the historical events that took place after the Prophet's (saws) demise.

After the Prophet (saws) passed away, the Muslims were divided into two groups: one who accepted the legitimacy of the first Caliph's election, and another who rejected it. Abu Bakr was elected on the 28th of Safar at a meeting at a place called *Saqifah bani Sa'idah* in Madinah shortly after the Prophet's (saws) death. Fewer than 200 of the Prophet's (saws) companions – of whom the majority were *Ansar* from Madinah – were present. The meeting was followed by an election, which took place without the knowledge of the vast majority of the *Muhajireen* from Mecca, including Imam Ali (as) and the Prophet's (saws) household. Although the choice of leadership has always been debated among Muslims, the indisputable fact is that there exists no historical precedent, Qur'anic injunction, or prophetic

command to legitimise the election that took place at *Saqifah*. Therefore the method through which Abu Bakr assumed power was a mistake, as was later expressed by some of the prominent companions present at *Saqifah*, e.g., 'Umar Bin Khattab.

Thirty-eight years later, on the 1st Muharram 61 A.H., Imam Husayn (as) and a group of his family and companions were journeying from Mecca to the town of Kufah in southern Iraq. The Imam (as) was responding to dozens of written pleas from the people of Kufah requesting him to free them from the corruption they were suffering under the Ummayad government. Ten days later the Imam (as) and a small group of his faithful companions met their death on the plains of Karbalah. They had been abandoned by the people of Kufah and were subsequently murdered by the army of the Islamic State.

Although Muslims commemorate the tragedy of Karbalah every year, remembering the suffering of the *Ahlul Bayt* with great emotion, the historical and social factors pertaining to Ashurah are sometimes overlooked. It is vital that we examine Imam Husayn's (as) martyrdom within its broader socio-historical context in order to understand the root causes of this tragedy and realise how the Muslim community were able to accept such a fate for the household of their own Prophet (saws). One striking observation to be made regarding *Ashurah* is the complete reversal of roles played out in Karbalah, when compared to those at the time of the Prophet (saws). Imam Husayn (as), the son of Ali and Fatimah, and the grandson of the Prophet (saws), a purified member of the *Ahlul Bayt*, was slaughtered like a criminal by the army claiming to represent Muhammad (saws). At the same time, Yazid had assumed leadership of the Islamic State and dressed himself with the titles of *Amir ul-Mumineen*

and *Khilfat-ar-rasul*. Aside from his own irreligious behaviour, Yazid came from a family with a long history of enmity towards Islam. His father was Mu'awiyah, who had waged war on Imam Ali (as), and his grandfather was Abu Sufyan, who had been one of the Prophet's (saws) most bitter enemies during the early years of Islam.

A second important observation is the complete disregard for the Qur'anic and prophetic commandments to love the *Ahlul Bayt*, shown by the army that slaughtered them as well as the wider Muslim community, whose inaction allowed them to be murdered. In light of all this, it becomes easier to understand that the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (as) was no isolated incident, personal disagreement, difference of opinion, or unfortunate mistake as some Muslims would propose. It was a continuation of a struggle between the *'Ahlul Bayt* and their antagonists that was already generations old. This idea is re-enforced when we consider the prevalent social attitude of Muslims concerning the *'Ahlul Bayt* at the time of Imam Husayn's (as) martyrdom. Everyone would agree that the massacre of Karbalah could never have happened fifty years earlier. The government could not have attempted such a blatant crime, as the Muslim community would not have tolerated it. However, at the time of Imam Husayn's (as) uprising the Muslims responded with apathy and failed to support or protect him. There was a profound shift in the social attitude of the Muslim community regarding the *'Ahlul Bayt* from the time of the Prophet (saws) to the time of Yazid's reign. The science of sociology tells us that social attitudes can suddenly change in response to a dramatic event or through a more gradual process over a period of time. The history of Islam does not report of any such dramatic event having taken place that could have caused the Muslim community to change their opinion of the *Ahlul Bayt* from one of honour

to one allowing them to be murdered. In this case, the change in attitude occurred through a slow and prolonged process. In order to find out how this process took shape we need to retrace the steps from the time of Ashurah backwards into history until we find the root cause of this tragedy.

Yazid was the ruler of the Islamic State at the time of Karbalah, and it was he who gave the orders that led to the murder of Imam Husayn (as). Yazid inherited the caliphate from his father, Mu'awiyah, as a son inherits a kingdom from his father in a monarchy. Mu'awiyah ascended to the caliphate after a series of confrontations with Imam Ali (as) and Imam Hasan (as). It is important to note that Mu'awiyah was only able to forward himself as an alternative ruler to the Imams of *Ahlul Bayt* because of the great wealth and power he had accumulated as governor of Sham, a position given to him by his relative, 'Uthman. 'Uthman was the third Caliph who claimed leadership after being nominated from a six-man council staged by 'Umar. 'Umar, the second Caliph, inherited the caliphate at the command of Abu Bakr, who was the first Caliph of Islam.

Having established a chain of connection between a later event of Islamic history, i.e., Ashurah and an earlier one, i.e., Saqifah, it is possible to say that, while Imam Husayn (as) was killed in Karbalah, the first crucial step which would lay the foundations for this tragic end were set at Saqifah. By usurping the position of the *Ahlul Bayt* and depriving them of their rights, the seed was planted that in years to come would deliver its bitter fruit. It should be made clear at this point that we are not asserting that the participants of Saqifah planned to kill Imam Husayn (as). This was not their intention nor could they have foreseen it. However, by

electing a leader from among themselves, they damaged the future of Islam in two principal ways:

1. The institution of the Imamate was generally undermined. The Imamate was the social safeguard given to the Muslims by Allah to protect the community from falling into corrupt leadership and going astray. Beside this fact, the violation of the *Ahlul Bayt*'s rights contributed to the tragic end of Karbalah.
2. By bypassing Imam Ali (as) – the first appointed Imam after the Prophet's (saws) demise – and therefore the *Ahlul Bayt* as well, the participants at Saqifah marginalised the Prophet's (saws) household, belittling their central position within Islam. This was severely harmful to Islam, as it set the precedent for a series of occasions in which disrespect was shown to the *Ahlul Bayt*. And this disrespect later led to the diminishment of their influence and position, which the Prophet had established for them.

In conclusion, we see that the events of Saqifah – amongst other incidents that took place – had such far-reaching and disastrous consequences that they led to the tragedy of Karbalah over 50 years later. However, as we have already mentioned, we cannot hold the participants of Saqifah directly responsible for something that took place out of their knowledge and lifetime. It was their irresponsible actions that changed the course of Islam for generations, inviting tribulation simply because they chose what they wanted over what Allah (swt) had ordered.

We will now highlight some of the events, which contributed to the drop in position of the *Ahlul Bayt* in the minds of the Muslims; such a decline that would lead them into a state whereby they would apathetically watch the grandson of their Prophet (saws) mercilessly slaughtered in

front of them. Let us begin the countdown until the tragic day of Ashurah, therefore we will begin with number twelve counting down to the Day Zero.

12. Saqifat Bani Sa'edeh

Beware! By Allah, the son of Abu Quhafah dressed himself with it (the caliphate) and he certainly knew that my position in relation to it was the same as the position of the axis in relation to the hand-mill. The floodwater flows down from me and the bird cannot fly up to me. I put a curtain against the caliphate and kept myself detached from it.
Then I began to think whether I should assault or endure calmly the blinding darkness of tribulations wherein the grownups are made feeble and the young grow old and the true believer acts under strain till he meets Allah (upon his death). I found that endurance thereon was wiser. So I adopted patience although there was pricking in the eye and suffocation (of mortification) in the throat. I watched the plundering of my inheritance until the first one went his way but handed over the caliphate to ibn al-Khattab after himself.

(Then he quoted al-A`sha's verse:)

My days are now passed on the camel's back (in difficulty), while there were days (of ease) when I enjoyed the company of Jabir's brother Hayyan.[42]

These words of Imam Ali (as) should guide us back to the first days of the first Caliph of the Muslims, i.e., to the election of Abu Bakr. In these words, Imam Ali (as) is referring to Abu Bakr as 'the son of Abu Quhafah', and it bears a clever indication to a special point despite being

formulated in a polite way. Later on in this chapter, we will refer to what he may have meant.

The Prophet (saws) possessed the highest morals and a charismatic personality, which helped him succeed in establishing an Islamic State. He built a society based on Islamic values, which involved new social structures and completely different political and economic patterns. It would have been quite logical to consider the likelihood that the absence of the Prophet (saws) from the political arena would pose a prominent threat to the stability of the social and political situation. Therefore, when absent, the Prophet (saws) appointed a temporary governor every time he left Madinah, such as when on a military campaign. It is also a matter of common sense to consider his demise as the greatest threat to both the religion just beginning to spread and the new Islamic State, as it could lead to the absolute termination of both socio-political structures. It is thus apparent that the Muslims would have still felt an extreme need to be divinely guided and thoroughly led by the Almighty.

It is inconceivable that, after equipping humanity with the urge to attain perfection and bestowing on them the potentiality of ascent to a lofty degree, God would not lay before them the path leading there or deprive them of the guide that they needed.

However, since the life of the Prophet (saws) was transitory like that of other men, it was necessary that as soon as that great educator had departed, a successor should come to the fore: a righteous and worthy man, one possessing all the attributes needed to lead Muslims; someone who would continue the directive and educative role exercised by the Prophet (saws), in the most desirable or even ideal form.[43]

Allamah S. M. R. Al-Moudhaffar, regarding the succession, stated in his precious book *Al-Saqifah*":

It is facinorous to say that the Prophet left the choice to his nation, as that is tantamount to say that he, the Prophet, deliberately launched the nation into a gulf of everlasting dispute that claims lives, lacerates morals, and harries harmony, besides weakening Islam. [44]

However, immediately after the Prophet's (saws) death, sadly, a new course against the guardianship of Ali (as) was carried out at *Saqifah bani Sa'idah*. In contradiction to several prophetic commands concerning Ali's (as) leadership, some of the companions chose a leader from among themselves.

It has been recorded in the historical books that the majority of Al-Ansar who disliked many of the Muhajireen's figures were also divided into two groups: the *Awss* and *Khazraj*. They launched discussion as to who would become the leader of the *Ummah*. 'Umar – the close friend of Abu Bakr – informed him that Al-Ansar had gathered to discuss the matter, and then they hurried to the assembly at the Saqifah. Being distinguished figures of Al-Muhajireen, they intervened in the gathering. As they had – intentionally or unwittingly – dismissed the event of Ghadir Khum, which had taken place less than two months previously, they proceeded to argue with the Ansar as to who was closer to the Prophet (saws). Given the domestic clashes between the two groups, 'Umar asked his close friend to allow him to offer his allegiance. He responded immediately, as did many of those who fearing that the opponent may be elected Caliph followed in his steps, and thus Abu Bakr became the first Caliph in Islamic history. They returned to the Prophet's (saws) mosque to announce that:

Abu Bakr has been elected Calipha of the Muslims. Now all of you here give him your pledge of loyalty. The Ansar, Abu Obaida, and I have already done so.[45]

Imam Ali (as) refused to capitulate; therefore, he and his family represented the opposing force within Muslim society. In order to weaken the position of his opponents he argued his position in many different statements, which were recorded in the historical book *Al-'Imam was-Seyasah.*

With the establishment of a government in opposition to *Ahlul Bayt*, the first blow was inflicted upon their position in the Muslim community. The *Ahlul-Bayt* were marginalized from the political affairs of the *Ummah* and the precedent was set for disobeying and undermining them. Taking into consideration what happened at Saqifah, one can detect its ensuing dangerous effects whilst reading between the lines of the description by the key figures involved. 'Umar said, describing the event:

'It was faltah *(a fatal accident) that Abu Bakr became leader. No consultation or exchange of views took place. If anyone of you in the future invites you to do the same again, kill him.' Thus, the election of Abu Bakr was so unexpected, hasty, and careless that 'Umar described it by that statement.'*[46]

In other words, one may claim that this chaotic and raucous assembly in the outbuilding of the Saqifah resulted in the election of Abu Bakr as Caliph. And one may claim that this election was not necessarily the most correct outcome, based on the most correct method, as long as it is considered a fatal accident (*faltah*), from the dangerous consequences of which God (swt) had saved Muslims. One of the leading

Western historians writes the following about these words of 'Umar:

'Umar's justification of the quick election of Abu Bakr, in what amounted to a faltah, *because of the danger that the Ansar might otherwise have sworn allegiance to someone with whom the Muhajirun would not have been pleased, thus raises another question. Was it perhaps not only the possibility that the Madinas would have elected one of their own, but also that they might have put forward Ali, that worried the Muhajirun present, and induced them to act without proposing a broad* shura *of all concerned? If 'Umar's summary account can be trusted on this point, Abu Bakr in his speech did everything to avoid the case of Ali being raised. He based the right of Quraysh to rule solely on the claim that only they would be obeyed by all the Arabs, not on their relationship to Muhammad. In the later elaborations of the events at the Saqifah, Abu Bakr is, in contrast, described as basing the case of Quraysh primarily on their being Muhammad's kin. Such an argument, however, would have been an invitation to raise the question of the right of the Banu Hashim as the closest kin of Muhammad, a line ever pursued by Shi'ite polemicists against the Sunnite doctrine that the caliphs must be of Quraysh, the Prophet's broader kin. It is thus likely that Abu Bakr avoided the argument of blood relationships.*[47]

In conclusion, we may understand that the Ansar gave their allegiance to Abu Bakr only as a negative endorsement, as the best option left when better ones were eliminated. They were affected by his clever manœuvre whereby he mentioned only those points that disclosed the chances for the unwanted party to be a successful candidate. They did not, by any means, designate the best qualified man. 'Umar very deftly shelved the question of qualification, and never let it arise in the debate.[48] One of the modern historians writes, in analysing this story:

Then 'Umar turned to the main subject. 'It has reached me that one of you has said: "By God, if 'Umar b. al-Khattab were to die, I would swear allegiance to so-and-so." Let no one be seduced to saying: "The oath of allegiance for Abu Bakr was a faltah, *yet it succeeded." It was indeed so, but God has warded off its evil (*waqa sharraha*). Towards no one among you have necks been stretched out as for Abu Bakr. Whoever were to swear allegiance to any man without consultation (mashwara) among the Muslims, his oath of allegiance would be invalid and both of them would be subject to being killed.'*

'Umar then gave an account of the events after the death of Muhammad. While the Ansar with their noble men (ashraf) assembled in the Saqifat Bani Sa'ida, Ali, al-Zubayr and 'those with them' gathered in Fatimah's house. 'The Muhajirun' joined Abu Bakr, and 'Umar suggested that they go to 'our brethren' the Ansar. On the way there they met two 'upright' men of them who told them about the plotting of the Ansar and advised them to turn back and settle their own affairs, but 'Umar insisted on proceeding. They found the Ansar and in their midst Sa'd b. 'Ubada, distinguished Companion and chief of the Banu Sa'ida and of all of Khazraj, a sick man wrapped in a mantle. One of the Ansar stood up and addressed the Muhajirun: 'We are the Helpers and the legion (katiba) of Islam, and you, company of Quraysh, are the clan of our Prophet, and a group (daffa) of your people have made their way to us.' 'Umar realized that they intended 'to cut us off from our root [i.e., the Quraysh of Makkah] and to usurp the rule from us.' He wanted to give a speech, which he had prepared in his mind, but Abu Bakr stopped him and spoke himself. He said what 'Umar had ready in his mind, only better than he could have done. Abu Bakr started: 'O group of Ansar, every virtue you mention of yourself you are worthy of, yet the Arabs will not recognize the rule of anyone but this tribe of Quraysh. They are the most central [noble] of the Arabs in lineage and abode. I am satisfied with either of these two men for you, so swear allegiance to whichever you want,' and he took both 'Umar and Abu 'Ubayda b. al-

Jarrah by the hand. 'Umar commented that this was the only matter in his speech that he found loathsome, since it was inconceivable for himself to command a people that included Abu Bakr.
*Al-Hubab b. al-Munadhir of the Ansar, a veteran of Badr, now proposed to settle the dispute fairly by agreeing that the Ansar and the Quraysh should each choose an amir. As tempers flared and voices were raised, 'Umar told Abu Bakr: 'Stretch out your hand,' and gave him the handshake of the pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*), the Muhajirun and the Ansar followed suit. 'Then we jumped upon Sa'ad until one of them called out: "You have killed Sa'ad b. 'Ubada." I said: "May God kill Sa'ad!" 'Umar concluded: "By God, we did not find any case stronger than for the oath of allegiance to Abu Bakr. We feared that if we left the people without a pledge of allegiance they might, after our departure, suddenly make pledge. We would then have had either to follow them in [a choice] with which we were not pleased, or to oppose them, and evil (*fasad*) would have resulted.*[49]

Thus 'Umar – as one of the key figures and main instigators at Saqifah – was absolutely right when he realized that it would be a dangerous approach if anyone were to establish his own consultive group and then proceed to elect a ruler for the Muslim *Ummah* by imitating the same conditions that existed during the Saqifah. This approach, despite being a non-consultive approach, could cause a great deal of harm to the Muslim *Ummah* and lead to absolute chaos in the Muslims' political arena. Madelung discusses the dangerous consequences of such an approach, saying:

'Umar judged the outcome of the Saqifah assembly to be a faltah *because of the absence of most of the prominent Muhajirun, including the Prophet's own family and clan, whose participation he considered vital for any legitimate consultation (*shura, mashwara*). It was, he warned the community, to be no precedent for the future. Yet he also defended the outcome, claiming that the Muslims were longing for Abu*

Bakr as for no one else. He apologized moreover, that the Muhajirun present were forced to press for an immediate oath of allegiance since the Ansar could not have been trusted to wait for the legitimate consultation and might have proceeded to elect one of their own after the departure of Meccans.
Another reason for 'Umar to censure the Saqifah meeting as a faltah *was no doubt its turbulent and undignified end, as he and his followers jumped upon the sick Khazraji leader Sa'd bin 'Ubada in order to teach him a lesson, if not kill him, for daring to challenge the sole right of Quraysh to rule.'*[50]

In conclusion, if the election of Abu Bakr and the whole scenario is to be perceived in this way, special attention should be given to studying the motives behind the gathering rather than restricting ourselves to the limited view of the event.

The first provocative question raised is: Why did 'Umar and the others gather at Saqifah while the Prophet (saws) had not yet been prepared for burial? The more we search, the more we become entangled. Why did they gather at Saqifah without first consulting the people who were present in Madinah? If the meeting itself was supposed to constitute authority, then why was such a meeting never again convened – at least to prove the legality or credibility of the first?[51]

This event reveals the fact that some of the key figures during the Saqifah had various hidden agendas, and it opens up the possibility that they may have fostered secret plans or intentions before the event of Saqifah. Al-Moudhafrar elaborated on this subject in an analytical way when he stated:

No one can deny the disinclination of 'Umar bin Khattab towards Ali bin Abi Talib and 'Umar's being watchful against Ali with regards to succeeding the Prophet. Likewise, his party that was composed of Abu Bakr, Abi Obaida, Salem Moula Hazifa, Ma'ath bin Jabal, and their associates. Ali clearly indicated his disagreement with them in all stations and situations. He did not yield to Abu Bakr as long as Fatimah was alive. After her death, he remained with no alternative but to accept. Throughout the period that stretched from Abu Bakr and ended at the end of Othman he never took part in any of the battles while he was the pivot, like the one that is to a hand mill. Ali had told 'Umar that he ('Umar) supported Abu Bakr only in order to rotate the succession to himself. He once told 'Umar: 'Milk it for yourself while keeping the other half tied to him today in order that he can return it to you tomorrow'. So it happened. Abu Bakr nominated 'Umar to succeed him.

The meanderings of their minds finally became manifested in open expression. How they disdained Ali could be judged from a conversation between 'Umar and Ibn Abbass, which we insert here precisely as it was narrated by Ibn Abbass:

'Umar: *Do you know what kept your people from you after Muhammad?*

Ibn Abbass: *If I don't know; you would inform me.*

'Umar: *They hated to see the prophethood and the caliphate combined in you. So they (Quraysh) took to boast over you by choosing the caliphate. They succeeded and hit the target.*

Ibn Abbass: *If you permit me and don't get angry, I'll speak.*

'Umar: *Answer! Speak!*

Ibn Abbass: *As for you saying 'Quraysh succeeded and hit the target,' had they chosen for themselves as God had chosen for them, it would have been good for them in that they could not be rejected nor would they have felt jealousy. As for your saying that they hated to see the prophethood and caliphate combined in us, God has described the people who hate: 'That they hated what God sent down; and He spoiled their deeds.'*

'Umar: *O by God, words about you had been reaching me, but I hated to make you run away because of your position, which I don't want to lower.*

Ibn Abbass: *What's that? If that were true, why should my position descend? If it is a lie, it discloses the self.*

'Umar: *I am informed that you say: 'We have taken it by tyranny and jealousy.'*

Ibn Abbas: *As for tyranny, it is evident even to someone ignorant and to him who has endured it. As for jealousy, Satan felt it towards Adam, and we are the children of he who was the butt of jealousy.*

'Umar: *Ah, your hearts, O sons of Hashim, are full of jealousy – neither enmity goes nor the veil.*
Ibn Abbas: *Wait; don't say so. Our hearts are those that God has purified and removed error therefrom, either of jealousy or of deceit. The Prophet's heart was from Bani Hashim.*

'Umar: *Go away!*'[52]

We have narrated the conversation in detail because it discloses:

1. The effusion of malice that rankled on both sides and the sparks that ignited the flames.
2. The deliberation on their part to hinder the matter from reaching the members of the Prophet's Household; based on their sentiments of rancour and fear that the caliphate in addition to the prophethood, if stored in the Prophet's house, would be the factor for their ostentation and arrogance; According to Ibn Abbas, such fear was due to their jealousy, and this was their tyranny.
3. The Imamate is God's choice, which He appropriated in the members of His Prophet's house; it cannot have bearing upon the pleasure or the displeasure of the Quraysh.
4. Their tyranny in depriving the Prophet's Household from their right; a fact known by all.

History cannot deny or conceal the motive that pushed 'Umar to say that the Prophet (saws) was talking nonsense and to declare that only the Book of God would suffice for the people. All this was to keep the position of leadership from Ali.

Ali, in turn, did not remain calm; although he kept passive and avoided hostility, he stood up, claiming what was rightfully his, saying:

I am the slave of God and I am the brother of Muhammad, His Messenger. A slave of God cannot become the slave of anyone else. If you have succeeded in capturing the government of Muhammad because you are, as you said, closer to him than the Ansar, then I am his brother, and who among you can claim to be closer to him than myself? All Muslims should give their allegiance to me, and not to anyone else. You are robbing the family of your late master, of their right. You convinced the Ansar with the argument that the Messenger of God was one of you, and not one of them, and they surrendered the khilafat *to you. Now I use*

the same argument – your argument – that you used against the Ansar. We are the heirs of the Messenger of God in his lifetime and after his death. If you believe in his mission, and if you have accepted Islam sincerely, then do not usurp our rights...
...O Muhajireen! Do not take the power and the authority of the Messenger of God out of his house into your own houses. By God, the succession of Muhammad is our right. He, himself, made this declaration, and not once but many times. Is there anyone among you who has a better knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an than I have? Is there anyone among you who has better knowledge of the practices and sayings of the Messenger of God than I have? Is there anyone among you who can run his government better than I can? If there is, name him, and I will defer to him, but there is not. I alone can give true peace and prosperity and real justice for all Muslims. Therefore, do not yield to your temptations, and do not put your own ambitions and desires ahead of the commandments of God and His Messenger. If you do, you will deviate from truth, and you will fall into error.[53]

Every single person amongst the Muhajireen and the prominent people of the Ansar never, for one moment, doubted that Ali (as) was the right person to succeed the Prophet (saws). The only doubts they had centred on their concern for Ali's (as) youthfulness, and the malice of the Arabs, especially the polytheistic Arabs and Quraysh.

The first concern can be understood from a historical narration, which describes a conversation between Abu Bakr's father, Abu Quhafah, and a group of Muslims he met directly after the election of Saqifah. Abu Quhafah asked them what had happened, and they replied, 'Your son was elected as the Caliph of the Muslims.' Surprised, he asked them, 'Why him?' They answered: 'He was the oldest man

from amongst the Prophet's (saws) companions.' He replied, disappointedly, 'But I am older than he!'

I assume that the reason why Imam Ali (as) referred to the first Caliph as the son of Abi Quhafah is related to this historical fact; as he was still alive when his son was elected, and this relevant conversation is strong and perplexing for anyone who adopts the Sunni version of the election of the Muslims' Caliph.

The second concern is related to the fact that, in the way of Islam, Ali (as) shed the blood of many polytheists. Arabs whose family members had been killed by Ali (as) would have harboured grudges against him. Aside from this point, the Quraysh did not like to see the pride and prominence of the caliphate, which the prophethood had already provided Bani Hashim with, given to the same family again.[54] 'Umar had expressed this point explicitly on many occasions. Thus, they took distance from him. In Nahjul Balaghah, Shareef Ar-Radhi narrates:

When, after the death of the Prophet, news reached Amir al-mu'minin about the happening in Saqifah of Bani Sa`idah, he enquired what the Ansar had said. People said that they were asking for one chief from among them and one from the others, Amir al-mu'minin said: 'Why did you not argue against them (Ansar) that the Prophet had left his will that whoever is good among Ansar should be treated well and whoever is bad he should be forgiven.'
People said: 'What is there against them in it?'
Amir al-mu'minin said: 'If the Government was for them there should have been no will in their favour.'
Then he said: 'What did the Quraysh plead?'
People said: 'They argued that they belong to the lineal tree of the Prophet.'

Then Amir al-mu'minin said: 'They argued with the tree but spoiled the fruits.'[55]

From this and other historical narrations it is apparent that Ali (as) made it explicitly clear that he was the most qualified candidate for leadership, and if he was the right man for this rightful caliphate it proves that the Qurayshites shared malice with other Arabs as well as hatred towards him. After the death of the Prophet (saws), the caliphate was more befitting for him than for anyone else. The Arabs and particularly the Quraysh created setbacks, such as disobeying the Prophet's (saws) command to join Usama's army and preventing the Prophet (saws), while he was dying, to write down what he wished. It seemed that some shrewd Ansar smelt something cooking and their subsequent flowing juices made them crave the taste of the first morsel, a desire that did not appear too great a sin, as long as strangers fanned the fire under the cooking pot; a pot other than the one belonging to the owners.[56]

As for Ali (as) and those who were in the house, and as for those who were out – Bani Hashim, and the Muhajireen and the other Muslims – they were all unaware of these covert happenings and none knew what Abu Bakr and 'Umar were bent upon. It has been recorded in history that Imam Ali (as) ended his speech with these words:

O people! Know that today a great mischief and sedition is afoot, and the instigator of it is that same unruly and rebellious group, of whom the Prophet of God has repeatedly spoken about and warned us of. [57]

It is impossible to understand this whole affair other than to see it as a mischief that enwrapped all Muslims into its folds, inflicting its harm, in particular, on Ali and Bani Hashim.[58] However, some claim that all these policies were

adopted intentionally and that no one can assume that it just happened and only unwittingly harmed the *Ahlul Bayt*. Sayed M. Baqir As-Sadr writes:

But we feel, when we study the policy of the rulers, that they followed, since the first moment, a certain policy towards the Prophet's family in order to crush the concept that supplied the Hashimites with power for the opposition as they crushed the opposition itself. We can describe this policy as that which aimed at abolishing the honour of the Hashimite house and removing its sincere assistants from the public utilities of the Islamic government system at that time and divesting it of its respect and high position in the Islamic mentality.[59]

Regarding the future policy adopted, i.e. that both the first and second Caliph were not in favour of *Ahlul Bayt*, Sayed M. Baqir As-Sadr writes:

They knew very well that establishing a political entity for the Umayyads – the old enemies of the Hashemites – anew would present an opponent for the Hashemites and so the individual opposition against the Hashemites would advance into opposition of a family completely ready to dispute and compete.
This opposition would last and widen because it was not of an individual person but of a big family. We can understand from this that it was the policy of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, which had put the cornerstone of the Umayyad state in order to ensure the opposition for Ali and the family of Ali along the way.[60]

By discerning the facts taken from these quotations and several historical sources, one is able to conclude some crucial points, all of which confirm that Ali (as), along with his family, were victims of a political coup and a well-organized plan to isolate him and manipulate the masses, in

order to deprive *Ahlul Bayt* from their legitimate rights, and to justify any committed oppression against them.

About the Excesses of the Quraysh

O God! Be my witness that they have not observed the respect due to kinship, and have violated their pact with me, and have instigated people with hostility towards me.[61]

These words of Imam Ali (as) describe the conditions after the Prophet's (saws) departure. One is able to understand Imam Ali's (as) complaints about the Quraysh. He once said, in Nahjul Balaghah:

O, my Allah! I beseech Thee to take revenge on the Quraysh and those who are assisting them, for they have cut asunder my kinship and overturned my cup, and have united to contest a right to which I was entitled more than anyone else. They said to me, 'If you get your right that will be just, but if you are denied it that, too, will be just. Endure it with sadness, or kill yourself in grief.' I looked around but found no one to shield me, protect me, or help me except the members of my family. I refrained from flinging them to death and therefore closed my eyes despite the dust, kept swallowing saliva despite (the suffocation of) grief, and endured pangs of hunger although it was more bitter than colocynth and more grievous than the bite of knives.

The rulers did not have any excuse to justify their actions except what they claimed, that they were afraid of chaos and disorder. The celebrated historian al-Masudi writes:

After the events at the Saqifah, Ali told Abu Bakr, 'You have trampled on my rights, refused to consult with me, and ignored my claims.' Abu

Bakr's only answer was to say, 'Yes, but I was fearful of chaos and disorder.'[62]

It is thus evident that such a defence may convince simple-minded individuals of the justification of taking control of the leadership of the Muslim *Ummah* after the Prophet's (saws) departure, but it can never provide logical reasoning for their other acts, such as the threats and confiscation of Fadak, which will be studied below.

11. 'Umar's Threats

This incident clearly shows the contempt that was held by one of the Saqifah government's most senior members for the *Ahlul Bayt*. Soon after the Saqifah government established itself, it realized that it would never gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslim *Ummah* as long as the *Ahlul Bayt* refused to consent to it and rejected its authority. The *Ahlul Bayt* and their followers would not offer allegiance to the first Caliph and they made their disapproval clear by staying inside the house of Fatimah (as). This form of opposition demonstrated a peaceful strike to declare the authority as illegitimate.

Although there were many people in Madinah who had taken the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr there were also some who had not. The new Caliph and his advisers believed that it was essential for Imam Ali (as) to take the oath of loyalty like other people. They therefore sent for him, but he refused to come. His refusal infuriated the second Caliph. A little earlier, he was the Caliph-maker but now he had become the chief executioner of the new government of Saqifah. He, therefore, went with an armed escort to enforce the orders

of the government, and threatened to burn down the house of the daughter of Muhammad (saws) the Messenger of God, if Ali (as) did not go to the court to take the oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr. Someone pointed out that the house belonged to the daughter of the Prophet (saws), and that she was inside the house, so how could 'Umar set it alight? 'Umar said that it did not matter if the house belonged to the daughter of the Prophet (saws), what was important, he asserted, was the oath of allegiance that Ali had to take.[63]

Although such actions can never be justified, it is important to understand the effect this incident would have on the mindset of the generations immediately following this event. 'Umar was highly regarded and greatly feared by the majority of Muslims in his lifetime. For this reason, people were reluctant to see him in a negative light, and rather than admit the truth about his unjust decision, it became preferable to play down, ignore, or even deny reports of this story. While there was no intended disrespect towards Fatimah (as) in doing this, it lowers her status in a way that no honourable person would wish for a lady of her rank; and by attempting to protect 'Umar's honour, the honour of Fatimah (as) is neglected as well as her rights.

A Western historian writes the following in *The Succession to Muhammad*:

The sources mention the actual use of force only with respect to the Companion al-Zubayr who had been together with some others of the Muhajirun in the house of Fatimah. 'Umar threatened to set the house on fire unless they came out and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr. Al-Zubayr came out with his sword drawn, but stumbled and lost it, whereupon 'Umar's men jumped upon him and carried him off. There is some evidence that the house of Fatimah was searched (futtisha).[64]

Thus, the natural course of the story was that when it became evident that Imam Ali (as) wouldn't pay allegiance, he remained in peaceful strike in the house of Fatimah, along with his household and his companions. 'Umar became angry, went to the house with his companions, and threatened to burn it down if Ali (as) did not come out and comply with the order of the Caliph. 'Umar was told that Fatimah was in the house, but he could only let fly with these detestable words: 'So what?' He called for wood, set fire to the door, and forcefully pushed it open, pinning Fatimah (as) against the wall. This resulted in her losing her unborn son, Mohsen, who was still in her womb.

This is the most tragic version of the story, narrated by some Shi'ah historical references. However, not all historians accept these disgraceful scenes. Some have rejected them entirely, refusing to believe that Muslims – out of respect for the *Ahlul Bayt* – would ever have justified committing such an attack, and that, therefore, the first Caliph could never have committed such an attack or allowed it to have taken place. The modern Western historian Wilfred Madelung writes:

In general the threat of it was probably sufficient to induce the reluctant to conform. Isolated reports about the use of force against Ali and the Banu Hashim who, according to al-Zuhri, unanimously refused to swear allegiance for six months, are probably to be discounted. Abu Bakr no doubt was wise enough to restrain 'Umar from any violence against them, well realizing that this would inevitably provoke the sense of solidarity of the majority of 'Abd Manaf, whose acquiescence he needed. His policy was rather to isolate the Banu Hashim as far as possible. 'Aiy'shah's comment, that the prominent people ceased to speak to Ali until he acknowledged his mistake and pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr, is significant. The Banu Hashim thus found themselves in

a situation strangely reminiscent of the boycott that the pagan Meccans organized against them in order to force them to withdraw their protection from Muhammad. This time, however, it was the Muslims putting pressure on them to abandon their support of Ali who, in contrast to Muhammad, gave in, surrendering his claim after the death of Fatimah. [65]

Whichever version is correct, it is confirmed from both historical viewpoints that Imam Ali (as) along with his household proclaimed the illegitimacy of the *Saqifah* government. He (as) declared this in actions as well as in words. He declared explicitly to the public that he was the right and most suitable man to become Caliph of the Muslims, and that such a threat of violence by the government was a disgraceful reply.

Some have astutely stated that all these losses and damages were inflicted on Islamic society as a whole, despite the limited area and short period of time in which they occurred. The damage and evil consequences of this invisible war gradually appeared after the battle during many long subsequent years, and involved many parts of the Islamic realm and the majority of Muslims, about which no figure can be given.[66]

10. Confiscating Fadak

Fadak was one of the estates acquired by the Prophet of Islam (saws) after the conquest of Khyber in 7 A.H.. However, since his troops did not have to fight for it, and it was surrendered voluntarily to him, it was considered the property of God and His Messenger (saws). The Messenger of God (saws) made Fadak a gift to his daughter, partly as a

recompense for the great sacrifices her mother, Khadija, had made for Islam.

When Abu Bakr took charge of the government of the Muslims, one of his first acts was to take forcible possession of Fadak. He evicted the agents of Fatimah Zahra (as) from her estate, and confiscated the property her father had given her in Madinah. Thus it was the first Caliph who confiscated the land of Fadak, which had belonged to Fatimah. Despite Fatimah's Qur'anic arguments and solemn word that Fadak had been given to her by her father, the first Caliph overruled this on the basis of a *hadith* that had not been heard by anyone except himself. Aside from the theft and humiliating treatment suffered by Fatimah at the hands of the first Caliph there is an important political motive that underlies this incident. By confiscating Fadak, the Saqifah government was depriving the *Ahlul Bayt* and their descendants of an important source of income; as in any society, material wealth ensures status and political influence. Therefore, in order to prevent any future insurrections by the *Ahlul Bayt* and their followers, the government had to cut off their source of finance.

One of the contemporary Shi'ah writers analyses the case of Fadak and its aftermath in the following:

When Fatimah Zahra protested against these seizures, Abu Bakr answered her with a 'tradition' of her father. He said that he had heard the Apostle of God saying that the apostles do not have any heirs, and such wealth, property, or material goods as they possess in their lifetime, belong after their death not to their children, but to the Ummah. Fatimah said that Fadak was not a bequest of her father, it was a gift. She claimed that Fadak was the private property of the Apostle of God, and it was as his private property that he had given to her.

Abu Bakr asked if there were any witnesses.
This was truly fantastic. Only four years had passed since the conquest of Khyber. Abu Bakr was not only present at the siege but had also made an abortive attempt to capture the fortress. He had seen with his own eyes what the Apostle had done with Fadak. Now four years later, he was acting as if he did not know anything. According to Bukhari, the collector of Hadith, the following dialogue took place between the plaintiff and the defendant.

Fatimah: *O Abu Bakr, if your father dies, who will be his heir?*
Abu Bakr: *I, who am his son.*
Fatimah: *Who is the heir of my father?*
Abu Bakr: *You, his daughter.*
Fatimah: *If I am his heir, then why have you seized Fadak?*
Abu Bakr: *I have heard the Apostle of God saying: 'We are the group of prophets, and we do not have any heirs to inherit our property. Whatever property we have, belongs to the Ummah when we die.'*
Fatimah: *But my father bestowed Fadak upon me as a gift during his lifetime, and it has been in my possession all these years.*
Abu Bakr: *Do you have any witnesses?*
Fatimah: *Ali and Um Ayman are my witnesses.*
Abu Bakr: *The testimony of one man and one woman is not enough. There must be either two men or one man and two women. But, since it is not so, the case is dismissed.*
The ears Fatimah was addressing were not willing to listen to any argument or reason. The witnesses would have made no difference to those who were resolved not to be convinced. The accused party had one very conclusive argument in its favour, viz., Brute Force! It was an argument that had the power to silence every other argument, and it did. To support his action in seizing the estate of Fadak, Abu Bakr quoted a 'tradition' of the Apostle of God. But it is strange that he, alone, had heard this 'tradition'. And it is just as strange that Muhammad did not tell members of his own family that they would not inherit his property

after his death because he was God's Messenger, but he went around whispering 'traditions' into the ears of outsiders.[67]

And a Western historian writes:

Abu Bakr's front of meticulously following the practice and the precedents set by the Prophet in every respect was most difficult to maintain in his treatment of his predecessor's kin, the Banu Hashim. It was evident that the primary purpose of establishing caliphate rule on a sound basis was inconsistent with maintaining the privileged status of Muhammad's Ahlul Bayt, of applying the Qur'anic rules of inheritance to them, and of continuing to pay their Qur'anic shares of the war booty and the fay'; Abu Bakr's solution was both radical and ingenious. According to 'Aiy'shah's account, he told Fatimah and Al-'Abbas when they came to claim their inheritance from Muhammad, and in particular his land in Fadak and his share of the land of Khaybar: 'As for me, I have heard the Messenger of God say: "We [the Prophet] do not have heirs (la nurith). Whatever we leave is alms (sadaqa). The family of Muhammad (al Muhammad) can eat from that property." Surely, by God, I would not leave any matter undone which I have seen the Messenger of God do.' Abu Bakr's reply solved the problem of the Ahlul Bayt in one stroke without his losing face. Not only had Muhammad disinherited his family, he had also specifically affirmed that after his death his family should, if in need, accept alms which he had strictly forbidden them during his life because of their status of purity. As recipients of alms like ordinary Muslims, there was also no longer any justification for paying them their Qur'anic share of booty and fay'. All this, the Prophet had confided to Abu Bakr, and no one else, thus confirming that he was his chosen successor charged with implementing his instructions. The daughter of the Prophet must have been dumbfounded. Nor could she even openly question the word of her father's chosen successor. According to 'Aiy'shah, she henceforth kept away (hajarat) *from Abu Bakr and did not speak to him again about*

the matter until she died six months later. Ali buried her at night and did not inform the caliph of her death.
While the Prophet's daughter and kin were thus disinherited and demoted from their rank of religious purity, his widows were treated comparatively better."[68]

It appears that the first Caliph realized the importance of all these economic sources, and was therefore determined to deprive *Ahlul Bayt* from them. The claim about such a strange narration from the Prophet (saws) was refuted by Fatimah (as), when she criticized him implementing Qur'anic references, as the actual Qur'anic references refute his claims entirely. However, he was not willing to comply. He insisted – as we have already read from Madelung – that they should be fed from alms; something which was prohibited for them during his lifetime because of their purity. It lacks credibility to claim that the Prophet (saws) respected them during his life and then deprived them from such an elevated status after his death, knowing that they should be respected and their needs should, then, be fulfilled. Even if one supposes that there was such a narration, which was heard, solely, by Abu Bakr, the question of why others were treated better – as we have already read from Madelung – remains unanswered. It is far from easy to claim that Fatimah (as) was satisfied with what was going on until she passed away. The manner in which she was buried and her insistence that her funeral be conducted in private and in secret indicates her disappointment.

In my opinion, the cases of Saqifah and Fadak reveal a wider and deeper plot against Imam Ali (as) and everything that would contribute to his political power, including that which he could have gained through his wife and family. This point is manifest in the act of confiscating the property of Fadak. This act indicates a symbolic sign that the *Ahlul*

Bayt were deprived from their prophetic heritage, both from the economic side and the political side; with all the implications.

The action of the Saqifah government in seizing Fadak had little to do with law or its interpretation. Its leaders were inspired by a single aim, viz., to deprive the children of Muhammad Mustapha of their means of living. Sadaqa was unlawful for them, and they could not accept it. The property which he gave them was confiscated, and their right of inheritance was not recognised.[69]

It was not long before Imam Ali (as) had to face another disaster, the death of his beloved wife.

9. The Departure of the Beloved Daughter of the Prophet (saws)

For the reasons detailed above one can detect why Fatimah, who was a young lady, died only a few months after her father's (saws) demise. She was sad, and the sorrow badly affected her physical circumstances. The deprivation of Imam Ali (as) from being the Caliph was not a simple case, in her eyes, or a personal loss, as it represented an establishment for innovation and a deviation from the pure Islamic revelation, paving the way for a long-lasting oppression of the *Ahlul Bayt*, who embody the right path and perfect guidance. She was well aware of what was going to happen to her descendents, but could do nothing to prevent it. After losing her unborn son, Mohsen, she was unable to live any longer and she died shortly afterwards on either the 13th of Jamadi'e Al-'awal or the third of Jamadi'e Al-thani in the same year as her father's (saws) demise.

Historical sources confirm that her death had a grave effect on Imam Ali's (as) spirit and emotions, as he deeply felt the sorrow and loss of his wonderful wife and staunchest supporter. We read from Imam Ali (as), in a sermon of *Nahjul Bhalagha* on the occasion of the burial of Fatimah (as), addressing the Holy Prophet at his grave:

...Certainly, your daughter would apprise you of the joining together of your Ummah *(people) for oppressing her. You ask her in detail and get all the news about the position. This has happened when a long time has not elapsed and your remembrance has not disappeared. My* salaam *(salutation) be on you both, the* salaam *of a grief-stricken, not a disgusted or hateful, person, for if I go away it is not because I am weary (of you), and if I stay it is not due to lack of belief in what Allah has promised those who endure.*[70]

It is neither a supplication with his Lord nor a dialogue, as Imam Ali (as) knew that they had passed away, but rather a releasing of his emotions, and a message left behind for history to judge. He was explicit in his dismay when complaining about the Muslims, and how they hastened in their committal of unjust and oppressive acts following the death of the Prophet (saws). It also reveals the apathy of those individuals towards the Qur'anic advice and the Prophet's (saws) emphasis on loving the *Ahlul Bayt* (as) and respecting their position.

From these sorrowful words, one can also read between the lines and detect his feeling regarding their oppression after the Prophet's (saws) death, as well as their shortage of means. Imam Ali (as) was without the firm support that was in many ways embodied in the Prophet (saws) and his divine message. Historical sources have confirmed that Imam Ali (as) and *Bani Hashim* were under severe pressure to join the majority of Muslims who had accepted the

government of Saqifah and its legitimacy. He had no choice but to capitulate when he felt that it was pointless to remain in opposition when nothing could be achieved. A contemporary Western historian writes about these few days following the death of Fatimah (as) and its aftermath:

Ali promised his public pledge of allegiance for the evening. When the afternoon prayer was over, Abu Bakr turned to the assembled people and offered some excuses for Ali. Then Ali rose and extolled the right of Abu Bakr, mentioning his excellence and prior merit (sabiqa). *He went forward to the Caliph and pledged allegiance to him. The people hastened towards Ali, congratulating him: 'You have hit the mark, well done.' 'Aiy'shah added: 'The people thus drew near to Ali when he drew near to the truth and what is proper.'*

Ali's public act of submission put an end to the isolation of the Banu Hashim and, on the surface, closed the ranks of the Muslims in support of Abu Bakr. Yet reconciliation there was none, and could not be. Each of the two men looked through the other's motives and thoughts all too well to believe his reassuring words and gestures. Under the circumstances, Ali could see nothing but hypocrisy in Abu Bakr's tears and protestations of his love for the Prophet's kin. He knew that the Caliph would continue doing all he could to keep the Banu Hashim away from power and influence and above all to prevent him, Ali, from ever succeeding to the caliphate. Abu Bakr likewise understood the insincerity of the younger man's recognition of his prior title to the succession of Muhammad and knew that Ali, if ever given the opportunity, would disavow the legitimacy of his caliphate of Quraysh and establish his own based on the rights of Muhammad's Ahlul-Bayt. There could be no relationship of trust between them. [71]

It seems that many did not believe that Abu Bakr would be willing to take the responsibility of the caliphate after his death, however they had seen a signed and sealed statement

from Abu Bakr appointing 'Umar for his succession. Imam Ali (as) was thus right in not believing in the government or the honesty of those claims. Therefore he states in his famous sermon *ash-Shiqshiqiyyah*:

It is strange that during his lifetime he wished to be released from the caliphate but he confirmed it for the other one after his death. No doubt, these two shared its udders strictly among themselves. This one put the caliphate in a tough enclosure where the utterance was haughty and the touch was rough. Mistakes were in plenty and so also the excuses therefore. One in contact with it was like the rider of an unruly camel. If he pulled up its rein, the very nostril would be slit, but if he let it loose, he would be thrown. Consequently, by Allah, people got involved in recklessness, wickedness, unsteadiness, and deviation.

In these lines, he has summed up how it was surprisingly acceptable by the first Caliph to appoint someone before his departure. He raised questions regarding the reliability of such claims when he wished to be released from it during his life. The second Caliph was thus appointed, and obviously no one had the right to criticize any of the measures taken by government of Saqifah.

Imam Ali (as) followed the same policy as he had done with the first appointment. He did not officially take part in their government, but nevertheless, because of their incompetence and ignorance of the laws of the religion, he remained steadfast in his obligation to spiritually and intellectually guide the nation to the right path and help it. In fact, 'Umar himself said many times about Imam Ali's (as) contributions: 'If it hadn't been for Ali, 'Umar would have perished.'
However, it seems that Imam Ali (as) was still under severe pressure as to how to handle the challenges of the second Caliph. The ultimate challenge was when the second Caliph

proposed marriage to his daughter. This case will be discussed in the following lines.

8. The Marriage of Um Kulthum

In one of his speeches, Imam Ali (as) complains about the miserable conditions he endured following the Prophet's (saws) demise. He says about the excesses of the Quraysh:

O my Allah! I beseech Thee to take revenge on the Quraysh and those who are assisting them, for they have cut asunder my kinship, overturned my cup, and have joined together to contest a right to which I was more entitled than anyone else. They said to me, 'If you get your right that will be just, but if you are denied the right, that, too, will be just. Endure it with sadness or kill yourself in grief.' I looked around but found no one to shield, protect, or help me, except the members of my family. I refrained from flinging them to death, and therefore closed my eyes despite the dust, kept swallowing saliva despite (the suffocation of) grief, and endured pangs of hunger although it was more bitter than colocynth and more grievous than the bite of knives. [72]

Imam Ali (as) is referring to the way in which he was deprived of his rights and the method by which it was done, despite alluding to the best amongst the Prophet's (as) companions. In these words he introduces the alternatives that he faced; from them, which were that, since he was deprived of his rights, he should thus die from sorrow and sadness. He was aware that, if he were to stand up, in addition to being taken incorrectly as a man full of greed for power and leadership, he would not achieve anything. The Muslims would be divided and the *Ummah* would suffer harmful results during its most critical period in the history

of Islam. He, therefore, decided to remain passive, and save both Islam – as a great faith – and his family members.

These words lead us also to contemplate one of his greatest tests during that period. As the second Caliph sought to show the relationship he had with Imam Ali (as) at its best, he decided to employ a special political tactic to secure this bond. If Imam Ali (as) failed to comply with his gestures, then, again, he would be put under severe pressure. One of the contemporary Western historians mentions this case briefly while writing:

Although aware that Ali had not entirely renounced his ambitions to rule as the chief of Muhammad's kin, thus threatening the caliphate of Quraysh, 'Umar sought to draw the Prophet's cousin closer to himself within the council of early Companions. He regularly consulted him together with the other early Companions and insisted on marrying Ali's daughter Um Kulthum, granddaughter of the Prophet. The latter, a mere child at the time, resisted, presumably aware of 'Umar's harsh treatment of women. [73]

Many historians have mentioned that Imam Ali (as) had three sons and two daughters from Fatimah (as); the first daughter was called Zaynab, and the second Um Kulthum.[74] Sunni sources have unanimously agreed that Um Kulthum married the second Caliph, but sometimes they add shameful details. These narrations have been studied and found to be entirely refutable according to the Sunni Muslim references regarding the knowledge of the narrators (*'ilm ar-rijal*). But, regarding Shi'ah historical narrations, one is shockingly informed that, according to a narration from Imam Sadiq (as), it is indicated that Um Kulthum along with her father, Imam Ali (as), were forced and threatened into complying with this situation. The second Caliph threatened that if his proposal was turned down then he

would take revenge in the form of a false accusation, such that Ali (as) would be punished. The Imam – despite being extremely provoked – was forced to capitulate and gave Al-Abbas the authority to perform the marriage formalities. A detailed study of this historical case is studied and analysed in a separate book on the same topic.[75]

The most important results concluded from this research are as follows:

1. Um Kulthum (as) is the sister of Zaynab (as) and the daughter of Ali (as) and Fatimah (as). She certainly existed as a living person, despite the unfounded assumption of various scholars who tried to deny her existence for certain reasons.
2. It is an unfounded claim to assert that Um Kulthum's marriage to the second Caliph cannot be confirmed or proven through historical and Islamic narrations.
3. Studying the case in the light of the Shari'ah is easy; however, the matter is easily concluded according to the research, as it became increasingly important and highly sensitive; therefore, certain groups have relied on various unfounded stories by which they attempted to deny the whole story of the marriage, some even going to the extreme of denying Um Kulthum's existence.
4. Some of the scholars, in order to substantiate their idea concerning the refutation of this marriage, indirectly begin to defend the second Caliph.
5. The only way by which we can confirm and accept that this marriage occurred and by which it can be associated with the oppression that the *Ahlul Bayt* (as) was suffering is by our own different resources, such *Al-Kafi*.

During the reign of 'Umar many deviations had occurred in Muslim society, as well as in the political arena. People who were far from being suitable for leadership became leaders and governors. A contemporary Muslim historian writes:

During 'Umar's caliphate, when Yazid ibn Abi Sufyan was stricken with plague he nominated his brother Mu'awiyah as the ruler of Syria and commander of the army in his own place, and 'Umar, the second caliph, accepted the nomination, and entrusted those positions to Mu'awiyah. It was thence that the foundation of the rule and caliphate of the Umayyads was laid.[76]

7. The Election Council

Nevertheless, I remained patient despite lengthy duration and stiffness of trial, till when he went his way (of death) he put the matter (of the caliphate) into the hands of a group and regarded me to be one of them. But good Heavens! What had I to do with this "consultation"? Where was there any doubt about me with regard to the first of them that I was now considered akin to these ones among them? But I remained low when they were low and flew high when they flew high. One of them turned against me because of his hatred and the other became inclined the other way because of his in-law relationship and this thing and that thing, until the third man of these people stood up with heaving breast between his dung and fodder. With him, his children of his grandfather, (Umayyah) also stood up swallowing Allah's wealth like a camel devouring the foliage of spring, till his rope broke down, his actions finished him, and his gluttony brought him down prostrate.

In these words from his famous sermon *ash-Shiqshiqiyyah* Imam Ali (as) summarized his criticism of the whole caliphate of the third Caliph, from the way he was elected to

the way he ruled over the Muslim *Ummah*. In contradiction to the methods by which the first two Caliphs had assumed power, 'Umar appointed a panel of six companions from which to nominate a Caliph. The members of this council were: Sa'ad ibn abi Waqqas, 'Abdur Rahman ibn 'Awf, Talha, Zubair ibn Al-a'wwam, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, and Ali bin Abi Taleb (as). He warned them that if they failed or disagreed they should all be killed. 'Umar's conditions specified that:

1. If they unanimously elected a person, that person would be designated the elected Caliph of the Muslims.
2. If there were a disagreement, then the Caliph would be whomever 'Abdur Rahman ibn 'Awf and his party voted for.
3. If any five of them agreed on one man and the sixth disagreed then the dissenter should be immediately killed.
4. If any four of them agreed on one man and two disagreed, then those two should be killed.
5. If there were an equal division of votes, then the deciding vote would be that of Abdullah bin 'Umar, 'Umar's son.

The final choice came down to Ali and 'Uthman with the ultimatum made by 'Abdur Rahman ibn 'Awf that whoever was to be Caliph had to rule according to the Qur'an and Sunnah and the institutions of the two previous Caliphs. Imam Ali agreed to the first two conditions, but refused the last. 'Uthman agreed to all three conditions, and was elected conversely.

Although the term *shura* (consultation) is often employed to justify a similar incident, it is in fact baseless, as *shura* cannot be confined to only six appointed people when the issue of caliphate is something that concerns the entire Muslim

community. It is also considerably vague why only those six were nominated to the Election Council. It becomes clear upon closer examination that this panel's indirect effect was to belittle Imam Ali's (as) status. This is because Imam Ali's (as) knowledge, character, and contribution to Islam were far superior to that of everybody else. By placing Imam Ali (as) as an equal member in this election panel, his status was lowered specifically in the eyes of the other panel members, and generally in the view of the Muslim *Ummah*. The other five members would consider themselves equal to Imam Ali (as) and with an equal claim to the caliphate, while the Muslim *Ummah* would consider Imam Ali (as) to be no more than a pious companion on the same level as other early companions, such as the other five members. This is especially true in view of the fact that the majority of Muslims by this time were new converts who were not necessarily aware of Imam Ali's (as) unique status from the time of the Prophet (saws).

Furthermore, when we examine the characters, prejudices, and family relationships of the six-man council, along with the conditions of the election imposed by the second Caliph, it becomes apparent that Imam Ali (as) stood no chance of being elected, as the second Caliph advised the Muslims to follow the group of 'Abd al Rahman bin 'Awf. In addition, the Muslims and the *Ahlul Bayt* would feel the harsh and damaging effects of this election in the years to come.

One of the main characteristics of this period is that the third Caliph favoured his own relatives, some of whom had previously been deported by the Holy Prophet (saws) himself. In this respect, 'Uthman deviated even further than his predecessors from the original teachings.

A prominent Muslim historian writes the following, describing the politics of the third Caliph:

It seems that unlike the tradition of the other two preceding caliphs, 'Uthman had prepared a special seat or throne for himself, which he sometimes shared with Abu Sufyan, leader of the Prophet's opponents and commander of infidel forces, as well as his wicked and winebibbing brother, al-Hakam, who was made an outcast by the Prophet.[77]

One can divide the Muslim *Ummah* during this period into four main groups:

1. The Umayyah group, which comprised the descendents of Umayyah, such as Abu Sufiyyan and his son Mu'awiyah, and all of their relatives.
2. The Caliph and his close friends who were not related to him but supported his legal caliphate.
3. The 'Alawi party; i.e., Bani Hashim, who were Ali and his family and the supporters of his family from other Muslim tribes and clans.
4. The majority of apathetic individuals who held no particular interest in the affairs of the Muslims.

One of the leading Muslim historians says this about a leading member of the first group:

After embracing Islam, Abu Sufyan had declared, 'I wish I could mobilize warlike groups against this man![78]

'This man' is the Prophet (saws). Elsewhere the historian says:

During the pagan times Umayyah and his descendants were deeply envious of the greatness and headship of Hashim and his descendants, and this jealousy produced many unpleasant results.[79]

He also says in the same direction:

Time passed and 'Uthman became Caliph, and once more the Umayyads assumed power, and like children who pass a ball to one another, the Umayyads transferred ranks and positions to each other. In each province, one member of the Umayyad house assumed the seat of governorship and was greatly proud of his position. It was at this period that the darlings of the Prophet's time, namely the chaste devouts, had become inferiors and weakened individuals like Ammar who was harshly treated, or like Abu Dharr and Malik al-Ashtar who were exiled to arid deserts![80]

In our analysis of the different groups, we can see that the first group has taken the side of the second in their quest for prosperity and power. In addition, they could take their revenge on the third party, who were driven to remain in isolation. Of course, the majority had the possibility to change the scenario had they participated forcefully, but given their apathy they neglected the conditions, sought calm, and chose the safer option. They failed to realize that, sooner or later, after the government had succeeded in crushing any opposition, they would do whatever they desired to ensure that the economic benefits fell on their side, depriving the majority of Muslims of their rights.

The first voice of opposition was from Abu Dharr who harshlycriticised the third Caliph. He was later deported from Madinah by the third Caliph, and the Muslims were prohibited from associating with him or even to say 'goodbye'.

Imam Ali (as) alone violated this prohibition and went to speak to him. When Abu Dharr was exiled to a place called ar-Rabadhah, Imam Ali (as) encouraged him saying:

O Abu Dharr! You showed anger in the name of Allah therefore have hope in Him for whom you became angry. The people were afraid of you in the matter of their (pleasure of this) world while you feared them for your faith. Then leave to them that for which they are afraid of you, and get away from them taking away what you fear about them. How needy are they for what you dissuade them from, and how heedless are you towards what they are denying you. You will shortly know who the gainer is tomorrow (on the Day of Judgement) and who is more enviable. Even if these skies and earth were closed to some individual and he feared Allah, then Allah would open them for him. Only rightfulness should attract you while wrongfulness should detract you. If you had accepted their worldly attractions, they would have loved you and if you had shared in it they would have given you asylum. [81]

Of course, 'Uthman received word of this action with anger and anxiety. The third Caliph summoned Ali (as) and criticised him for violating his order and attacking his representative. The Imam replied that he was doing his Islamic duty, and when he criticised him for hitting the representative's face, he replied that he did, in fact, hit a face, but not a human one; rather the man's bestial face. A Western historian summarizes these cases:

Ali also endeavoured to protect men whom he considered meritorious Muslims from maltreatment by the Caliph. Thus he intervened on behalf of the Companion Jundab b. Ka'b al-Azdi, who had killed a non-Muslim sorcerer, protected by al-Walid b. 'Uqba. The governor, whom the sorcerer had been entertaining with his tricks, wanted to execute Jundab for murder, but his tribe, Azd, protected him. He escaped from prison and sought refuge in Madinah. On Ali's intercession, 'Uthman sent al-Walid an order to refrain from action against Jundab, who returned to Kufah.[82] *Ali also protested against 'Uthman's brutal treatment of Ibn Mas'ud, reminding the Caliph of his early merits as a Companion of the*

Prophet, and took him to his own house for protection. He stopped 'Uthman from punishing a Kufan messenger who refused to reveal the names of those who had written a letter severely criticizing the Caliph.[83] *When 'Uthman exiled Abu Dharr, Ali made a show of solidarity with the deportee by accompanying him with several members of his family and 'Ammar, although Marwan, on the order of 'Uthman, tried to prevent him. This led to an angry exchange with 'Uthman. After the death of Abu Dharr, he intervened to forestall the banishment of 'Ammar.*[84]

These were then the circumstances during the third caliphate. However one can find the *Jahiliah* spirit evidencing itself again within the first group, as if it had been revived again during the reign of the third Caliph. A historical record confirms that Abu Sufyan once said, 'This matter of the caliphate is a worldly one, and this government is of the same kind as that of pagan times. Therefore it is up to you to make our tribe of Banu Umayyah the administrators of the worldwide realm of Islam.'

It was in the same period that Abu Sufyan one day, while passing by the tomb of Hamzah, the martyr of Islam, started kicking the tomb, and said, 'Abu Amarah, the thing for which we drew our swords yesterday, has fallen into the hands of our children today, and they are playing with it now.'

Thus we see that Abu Sufyan secured his evil wishes with the caliphate of 'Uthman, the fulfilment for which he had previously expended so much effort, and for which many leaders of the Quraysh had been killed, without any success on his part, owing to the valour of the Muslims. But now, in 'Uthman's time, and after his death the rule of the Umayyads fulfilled all those wishes.[85]

His politics had such a negative effect on the majority of people that it affected Muslim society as a whole. These actions caused even the most apathetic members of Muslim society to become involved. This marked the antagonism in the last days of 'Uthman's reign. However, what really agitated the majority was the way in which 'Uthman treated the uprising of the Egyptians. The Egyptians had been having long discussions with the third Caliph and he had promised to punish the governor of Egypt, writing a letter confirming this fact. However, whilst on their way back to Egypt, they noticed a black slave running in the direction of Egypt. They asked him where he was coming from and what he was doing. His answers aroused their suspicions and they detected that he was carrying a letter, which totally contradicted 'Uthman's promises. They, therefore, returned to Madinah, agitated and angry.

When faced by the letter and its carrier, the third Caliph denied any relation to the messenger and any responsibility for the document. When shown the letter signed and sealed by his personal seal, he denied any knowledge of it, claiming that Marwan had done it without either his knowledge or permission. This, of course, placed him in an even worse position because if he already knew about the matter he would obviously be a hypocrite, and if he did not know about it, he would not deserve to qualify as Caliph because others were playing around with his seal without his permission, and – worse still – even without his knowledge. They urged him to resign, but he refused, and this demand was the main cause that resulted in his being blockaded in his palace, together with his wife and a few loyal supporters. This situation lasted until the uprisers decided to

assassinate him, which they succeeded in doing after cutting his wife's fingers whilst she tried to save him.

There have been quite a few historians who believed that Ali (as) was guilty of the assassination of 'Uthman. A contemporary Western historian Wilfrid Madelung, writes critically about one of these historians:

Caetani was firmly convinced that the main instigator of the revolt and chief culprit in the murder of the Caliph was Ali. Since the Islamic historical tradition generally does not bear out this thesis, he accused the orthodox Sunnite sources of inveterate Alid, if not Shi'ite, bias and systematical anti-Umayyad distortion. Ali, he argued, could clearly be expected to be the prime beneficiary of the overthrow of 'Uthman. In fact, Ali, much younger than the Caliph, would almost certainly have succeeded him on a legitimate basis if he had patiently awaited 'Uthman's natural death. Yet he was driven by his inordinate ambition, which was quite incommensurate with his actual lack of political responsibility and acumen. Thus he conspired for the quick removal of 'Uthman as he had conspired before for the murder of 'Umar. Ali, Caetani conceded, probably did not incite the masses to murder 'Uthman, but he secretly created numerous difficulties for him in order to make him unpopular and to put himself in a favourable light, ultimately in order to force 'Uthman's abdication. [86]

These claims are contradictory. If Caetani conceded initially that Imam Ali (as) would be the likeliest and best candidate to succeed 'Uthman without violence, why then should Caetani say that Iman Ali (as) was the main instigator of the revolt and chief culprit in the murder of the third Caliph?

Historical records also demonstrate how Imam Ali (as) tried his best to mediate in search of a peaceful solution. In *Nahjul Balagha* we read the following account of dissatisfied people

sending a deputation to Ali (as) requesting him to speak to 'Uthman on their behalf and to admonish him for their sake. Ali (as) went to see him and said:

The people are behind me and they have made me an ambassador between you and themselves; but, by Allah, I do not know what to say to you. I know nothing (in this matter) which you do not know, nor can I lead you to any matter of which you are not aware. You certainly know what we know, we have not come to know anything before you, which we could tell you, nor did we learn anything in secret, which we should convey to you. You have seen as we have seen, and you have heard as we have heard. You sat in the company of the Prophet of Allah as we did. (Abu Bakr) Ibn Abi Quhafah and ('Umar) Ibn al-Khattab were no more responsible for acting righteously than you were, since you are nearer than both of them to the Prophet of Allah through kinship, and you also hold relationship to him by marriage, which they do not hold. Then (fear) Allah, in your own self, for, by Allah, you are not being shown anything as if you are blind or being apprised of anything as if you are ignorant. The ways are clear while the banners of faith are fixed. You should know that among the creatures of Allah, the most distinguished person before Allah is the just Imam who has been guided (by Allah) and guides others. So he stands by the recognised ways of the Prophet's behaviour and destroys unrecognised innovations. The (Prophet's) ways are clear and they have signs, while innovations are also clear and they too have signs. Certainly the worst man before Allah is the oppressive Imam who has gone astray and through whom others go astray. He destroys the accepted sunnah *and revives abandoned innovations. I heard the Messenger of Allah saying: 'On the Day of Judgement the oppressive Imam will be brought without anyone to support him or anyone to advance excuses on his behalf, and then he will be thrown into Hell where he will rotate as the hand-mill rotates, then (eventually) he will be confined to its hollow.'*

I swear to you, by Allah, that you should not be that Imam of the people who will be killed because it has been said that 'an Imam of this people will be killed, after which killing and fighting will be made open for them till the Day of Judgement, and he will confuse their matters and spread troubles over them. As a result, they will not discern truth from falsehood. They will oscillate like waves and would be utterly misled.' You should not behave as the carrying beast for Marwan so that he may drag you wherever he likes, despite (your) seniority of age and length of life.'
Then 'Uthman said to Amir al-mu'minin: 'Speak to the people to give me time until I redress their grievances.' Amir al-mu'minin then said, 'So far as Madinah is concerned there is no question of time. As for remoter areas you can have the time needed for your order to reach there.' [87]

Thus Imam Ali (as) played a crucial role in guiding him to control the problems before they worsened. The scholar Madelung also disagrees with Caetani's premise that Ali was the main instigator against 'Uthman. Madelung writes:

The premise of Caetani's argument was mistaken. The election of 'Uthman had demonstrated that Quraysh, as 'Umar had told Ibn al-'Abbas, would not consent to a caliphate of the Prophet's cousin. Ali had strongly pleaded his case and had been decisively rejected. Neither he nor his opponents could be under any illusion that the result might be different in another election. It was confidence that Ali was no longer a valid candidate that encouraged 'Aiy'shah and Talha to undermine 'Uthman's reign. If Ali had been the prime mover in the rebellion and its prospective beneficiary, 'Aiy'shah would have had no part in it. For whatever her dislike of 'Uthman's Umayyad arrogance, her hatred of Ali was seated more deeply. The same 'Aiy'shah who, just before the murder of 'Uthman, told Marwan she would like to toss the Caliph into the sea only weeks later was to assure the assembled Quraysh in Mecca

that Ali had killed 'Uthman, and that a mere fingertip of 'Uthman was better than the whole of Ali.'[88]

The outcome of the assassination of the third Caliph was a sorrowful case for the Muslims, although it might be seen in a positive light. From a negative viewpoint it reflects the first time that the Muslims humiliated the highest rank of their leadership, and for the first time suggests that the position of Caliph is held by an ordinary man who, sometimes, deserves to be killed. A positive point however is that the Muslims realized that this position should be entrusted, solely, to an individual who would not misuse it for his personal interests, or who, at least, should be absolutely qualified for it.

Imam Ali (as) was subsequently elected to the caliphate. He described this in his sermon *As-Shaqshiqiyyah*:

At that moment, nothing took me more by surprise, than the crowd of people rushing to me. It advanced towards me from every side, like the mane of the hyena, so much so that Hasan and Husayn were becoming crushed, and both ends of my shoulder garment were torn. They [the people] collected around me like the herd of sheep and goats.

By reading the last paragraphs of his speech, we approach the events that took place during his reign. He said:

When I took up the reins of government one party broke away, and another turned disobedient, while the rest began acting wrongfully, as if they had not heard the words of Allah saying: 'That abode in the hereafter We assign it for those who intend not to exult themselves in the earth, nor (to make) mischief (therein); and the end is (best) for the pious ones.' (Qur'an, 28:83)

Yes, by Allah, they had heard them and understood them, but the world appeared glittering in their eyes, and its embellishments seduced them. Behold, by Him who split the grain (to grow) and created living beings, if people had not come to me, and supporters had not exhausted the argument, and if there had been no pledge of Allah with the learned to the effect that they should not acquiesce in the gluttony of the oppressor nor the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the rope of caliphate on its own shoulders, and would have given the last one the same treatment as the first. Then you would have seen that, in my view, this world of yours is no better than the sneezing of a goat.

It is said that when Amir al-mu'minin reached this place in his sermon, a man of Iraq stood up and handed a piece of writing over to him. Amir al-mu'minin began looking at it, when Ibn 'Abbas said, 'O Amir al-mu'minin, I wish you would resume your Sermon from where you broke off. Whereupon he replied, 'O Ibn 'Abbas, it was like the foam of a camel which gushed out but subsided.' 'Ibn 'Abbas says that he never grieved over any utterance as he did over this one because Amir al-mu'minin could not finish it as he had wished to.

Historians from both Shi'ah and Sunni sides have recorded that 'Aiy'shah despised 'Uthman, but expected, however, that Ali (as) would have been absolutely driven away from the political arena. It seems that she miscalculated the situation as, when 'Uthman was killed, the people, contrary to her expectations, chose Ali (as) as caliph and swore allegiance to him. When she heard this report, she cried out, involuntarily, 'Pity for 'Uthman! He was innocently killed!' It was thus that 'Aiy'shah demonstrated her old hostility towards Ali, and worked hard in rousing opportunists who finally started the Battle of 'al-Jamal' against the Imam (as). In the next few lines, we will discuss the conditions, which paved the way for a struggle that caused the lives of many Muslims to be lost.

6. Jamal

By the time the caliphate had reverted to its original course, the Muslim *Ummah* had experienced much political turmoil and social upheaval from the policies practiced by the former Caliphs. However, during this sensitive time, *Um-ul-momineen 'Aiy'shah* herself spearheaded open rebellion against Imam Ali (as), at the instigation of Talha and Zubair. Since the election of Ali, Talha and Zubair had become intoxicated by the prospect of power, as they were members of the election council; they were, however, disappointed by Imam Ali (as) as he had not appointed either of them to any position of governorship. This disappointment is understandable when one considers that Talha and Zubair had, hitherto, been faithful supporters of Imam Ali (as). However, the justice of Imam Ali (as) could not allow personal relationships to take precedence over the affairs of the *Ummah*. So Talha and Zubair became motivated, by a combination of worldly factors, to raise an army that would be nominally led by 'Aiy'shah, in order to provide credibility in the eyes of the masses, to challenge Imam Ali's (as) authority. She was actually misused by Talha and Zubair to mobilize the mass of manipulated Muslims to fight the legal authority of Imam Ali (as). Faced with a large-scale rebellion, Imam Ali (as) had no choice but to fight. Although the human cost of this conflict was tragic, including the killing of both Talha and Zubair by their own soldiers, what is particularly significant is that, for the first time, a large section of the Muslims led by high-ranking companions were openly declaring themselves to be enemies of Imam Ali (as). Also, for the first time, an elected Caliph of Muslims, who represents a holy authority in Islamic political thought, was opposed and deliberately fought against by high-ranking so-called pious companions, such as Talha, Zubair, and Um-ul-momineen 'Aiy'shah. Analysing the situation

after Ali's (as) election, a contemporary Western historian writes:

The reign of Ali bore the marks of a counter-caliphate. By norms of the early caliphate, it lacked legitimacy. Ali was not chosen by a shura of the most eminent Early Companions which 'Umar had stipulated as a condition for valid succession. Nor had he the backing of the majority of Quraysh who under Abu Bakr's constitution had been recognized as the ruling class solely entitled to decide on the caliphate.

Yet Ali himself was firmly convinced of the legitimacy of his own claim based on his close kinship with the Prophet, his intimate association with, and knowledge of Islam from the outset, and his merits in serving its cause. The criteria for legitimate rule laid down by Abu Bakr and 'Umar were irrelevant from his perspective. He had told Abu Bakr that his delay in pledging allegiance to him as successor to Muhammad was based on his belief in his own prior title. He had not changed his mind when he finally gave his pledge to Abu Bakr and then to 'Umar and to 'Uthman. He had done so for the sake of the unity of Islam when it was clear that the Muslims had turned away from him, the rightful successor of Muhammad.

Whenever the Muslim community, or a substantial part of it, would turn to him, it was not only his legitimate right, but his duty, to take upon himself its leadership.

The murder of 'Uthman left the rebels and their Madinan allies in control of the capital with Talha and Ali as potential candidates for the succession. There seems to have been some support among the Egyptians for Talha, who had acted as their adviser and had the treasury keys in his possession. The Kufans and Basrans, however, who had heeded Ali's possession to the use of violence, and most of the Ansar evidently inclined to the Prophet's cousin. They soon gained the upper hand, and the Kufan leader al-Ashtar in particular seems to have played a major part in securing the election for Ali.[89]

Some of the abovementioned premises are questionable; for example the one regarding what are these premises and rules should have secured the legitimate caliphate. All that the Muslims had witnessed up to those days were different rules applied to the election of each and every Caliph. While the first Caliph was elected without the consultation of the main companions of the Prophet (saws), the second Caliph was elected without the mandating of any single individual of the Muslim community at all. The third Caliph was elected in another strange way, as we have read; through an invented institution, a council, which was specially appointed by the second Caliph. It seems the only rule that he is referring to is that the old party, the Umayyah's party, who had returned to power and had the majority of say in decision making, were not consulted in this regard. In addition, I believe that the moral issues during the long period of the first three Caliphs' reign were strongly shifted towards wealth and power. This point was indirectly referred to in the words above about the support of the Egyptians *who had the treasury key*. Many historical records indicate the huge amount of gold which some of the companions had left after their death, which signifies the truth of the fact that we have mentioned. One of the companions who witnessed the allegiance of Talha to Imam Ali (as) made the important remark regarding this. At-Tabari writes:

Habib ibn Dhu'ayb looked at him –Talha giving his allegiance- and said: This allegiance will not last, since that hand which is raised is defective and faulty![90]

This observation is based on a political analysis of Habib who, relying on his political sense, comprehended the real conditions, and the obstacles associated with it as, sooner or later, new coalitions would be formed against the new

elected Caliph. The first was the party who launched the war of Jamal, as Um-ul-Mumineen 'Aiy'shah decided, when Ali was elected to the caliphate, to fight against Imam Ali (as).

Ali himself mentions the reasons why she exerted vengeance against him, despite her agitation against 'Uthman and saying: "Kill Na'athal, as he is a disbeliever." Imam Ali (as) summarised the reasons in the following:

- The Messenger (saws) had preferred him to her father in different cases.
- The Prophet (saws) selected the Imam (as) as his brother in the pact of brotherhood as opposed to Abu Bakr or 'Umar.
- Only the door of the Imam's house could open into the mosque, all the others were closed.
- In the Battle of Khayber, when Abu Bakr failed to achieve anything, the banner of triumph was handed to the Imam.
- 'Aiy'shah had a grudge against Khadija as well as her daughter Fatimah (as), to whom Ali was married.
- The Imam (as) was beloved to the Prophet (saws) in such a way that once, when Ali came up to the Prophet, he was given a seat next to him. The Prophet (saws) praised him in response to 'Aiy'shah's objection. This greatly raised her desire for vengeance against the Imam.[91]

Ahmad Amin explains the reasons why 'Aiy'shah exerted vengeance against Fatimah (as). Talha and Zubayr came to Mecca and concluded that they could not do anything without 'Aiy'shah. They said to her: "If the Basrans meet you, they will be united with you." Imam Ali (as) also noted this and said of her: "She - 'Aiy'shah - is the most obeyed among people." Following various discussions, 'Aiy'shah was

persuaded to join them at Basra. This was not such a simple task, as first she had to blatantly go against the Qur'anic injunction that the wives of the Prophet (saws) had to remain in their homes (See Qur'an 33-33). This verse clearly bans the Prophet's wives from leaving their homes, referring to their participation in political struggles. As already said, 'Umar was even doubtful about letting them go on the Hajj and he only once permitted them to do so by first setting numerous restrictions. Some wives, such as Sawda and Zaynab, were not willing to go on pilgrimage for the same reason.

Um Salama tried her utmost to prevent 'Aiy'shah from going to Basra despite the fact that 'Aiy'shah had asked her to accompany her. It is reported that she said to Um Salama, quoting from 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Amir, that 'one hundred thousands swords are ready in Basra.' 'Have you come to fix this? In revenge for 'Uthman!' remarked Um Salama; 'Were you not the hardest against him? Were you not the one who called him '*Na'thal*,[92] the stupid old man?'

Um Salama described a few virtues of Imam Ali and asked her not to oppose someone to whom the Muhadjir and Ansar had sworn allegiance. She referred to this speech of the Prophet (saws):

عليّ ولي كل مؤمن ومؤمنة

Ali is the guardian of each and every believer.

'Abd Allah Ibn Zubayr standing at the door said, 'We haven't heard the Prophet say such a thing.' 'But your aunt', said Um Salama, 'has heard this and (also) this saying of the Prophet (saws):

علي خليفتي عليكم في حياتي ومماتي

Ali is my successor during my lifetime and after my death.

'Aiy'shah confirmed that she had heard this. She spoke about her action taken for the improvement of the affairs of the Muslims! She attempted to involve Hafsa too.

Um Salama, one of the supporters of the Ahlul Bayt, wrote to Imam Ali (as) telling him about the action of the rebels. 'By God, if the Prophet's wives had not been banned from leaving their homes, I would have come with you. Instead, I allow the most beloved of my loved ones; that is, my son, 'Umar Ibn Abi Salama.' Um Salama began to publicize about Imam Ali (as) among the Meccans, and said to them, 'I call you to seek divine piety and in this time I know no one better than Ali.'

When Maymuna, another wife of the Prophet (saws), heard about Talha and Zubayr's rebellion, she told the bearer of the news, 'Join Ali because he has never gone astray and nobody has been led astray by him.' She repeated this three times.

In a letter sent by a courier to the Imam (as), Um Fadl, daughter of Harith, told him about the readiness of the rebels.[93] Imam Ali (as) has mentioned the case of Talha and Zubayr in one his sermons:

By Allah, they did not find any disagreeable thing in me, nor did they do justice between themselves and me. Surely, they are now demanding a right that they have abandoned, and blood that they have themselves shed. If I partook in it with them then they too have a share in it, but if they committed it without me, the demand should be against them. The first step of their justice should be that they pass verdict against themselves. I have my intelligence with me.

I have never mixed matters nor have they appeared mixed to me. Certainly, this is the rebellious group in which there is the near one (az-Zubayr), the scorpion's venom ('Aiy'shah) and doubts which cast a veil (on facts). But the matter is clear, and the wrong has been shaken from its foundation. Its tongue has stopped uttering mischief. By Allah, I will prepare for them a cistern from which I alone will draw water. They will not be able to drink from it nor would they be able to drink from any other place.

In another part of the same sermon, he says:

You advanced towards me shouting 'allegiance, allegiance' like she camels having delivered newly born young ones leaping towards their young. I held back my hand but you pulled it towards you. I drew back my hand but you dragged it. O my Allah! These two have ignored my rights and have done injustice to me. They both have broken allegiance to me, and roused people against me. Unfasten Thou what they have fastened, and do not strengthen what they have woven. Show them the evil in what they aimed at and acted upon. Before fighting I asked them to be steadfast in allegiance and behaved with them with consideration but they belittled the blessing and refused (to adopt the course of) safety. [94]

In this sermon, we find that Imam Ali's (as) conclusions can be summed up in the following way:

1. Talha and Zubayr's party had not detected anything wrong, and they launched their campaign on a fault which they themselves had caused, and for which they should carry the blame.
2. The party of Jamal cast a veil over the facts, accusing Imam Ali (as) of mixing things; he declared that he had not done so and that they were responsible for what they had done;.

3. Imam Ali (as) had detected the core of the problem, and was decisive in eliminating the evil from its roots, so that it would not find another chance to rise against the truth;
4. He tried his best, before fighting them, to bring them back to the right path, but it appears that they refused, and were, therefore, lost.
5. At the end, even though they were defeated, they persisted in doing injustice to Ali (as). 'Aiy'shah caused a great division amongst the Muslims and an injury to the Islamic body, which would not be easy to heal, and she was the first person who justified an uprising against an Islamic leadership.

Many participants in the war against the party of 'Aiy'shah claimed to have taken the women as slave girls, however Imam Ali (as) criticised them, and asked them which one of you is willing to take 'Aiy'shah?

After fourteen hundred years, many Muslims casually question these events, or if they realize their danger, try to ignore them. A contentious question is how they would understand the Prophetic narrations, narrated mainly in Sunni references, in the light of these and other historical events!

However, one point remains confirmed: the way 'Aiy'shah acted against Ali, her aid to his enemies, her alliance with Talhah and Zubayr, who had broken their allegiance to Ali (as), and her initiating the Battle of Jamal, are all clear examples of her rancour and long-standing hostility towards Imam Ali (as). And she used those acts as a means to create division and dispersion among the Muslims. Her heart felt such hatred towards Ali that it gave her no tranquillity. Even when she heard the news of the Imam's assassination,

she even prostrated herself to thank God, and recited a couplet expressing her feelings.[95] This battle and other historical facts reveal that albeit defeated, she never ceased her hatred and struggle against Ali (as) to have him removed from his elevated position, and if she failed in doing so by utilizing force, she never ceased in implementing other methods to decrease his position.

5. Siffin

When Imam Ali (as) gained power he approved certain governors and sacked others. Among those who were not accepted was Mu'awiyah. Mu'awiyah waited until the Battle of Jamal to launch his own war. He was keen to utilize the same argument, and start his campaign from where others had failed, emphasizing the unjust killing of 'Uthman, albeit in a slyer, a more manipulative and sophisticated, manner. A contemporary Muslim historian writes:

But Mu'awiyah, in accordance with his father's will and for the sake of satisfying his ambitions, was seeking domination as a ruler. He wished to govern the whole wide realm of Islam, and he regarded the employment of every possible means legitimate for the attainment of his objective. He did not shun any wickedness and meanness in this course. In fact the claim for avenging 'Uthman's blood was only a cover to attain that goal. [96]

Elsewhere he says:

But Mu'awiyah had made an evil and ruinous plan. He wished to fight the Imam under the pretext of the innocence of 'Uthman and claiming

revenge for his blood, an excuse which had been brought up in the battle of al-Jamal.
He hoped that in this way he would fulfil the great desire of his own and the will of his father, Abu Sufyan, and seize control of the whole wide realm of Islam.'[97]

One may assert that this incident was similar to Jamal in that it was an open rebellion against Imam Ali (as) involving a large section of the Muslim *Ummah*. However, the major difference between Siffin and Jamal was the leadership of the rebellion and its devious tactics, which were revealed before the start of the war and later. In Jamal, the instigators of discord were early companions of the Prophet (saws) who had originally shown sincerity of belief but had later somehow gone astray. In Siffin, the leader of the rebellion was Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, an irreligious man with no Islamic distinctions, from a family that had a long and unpleasant history of fighting Islam and the Prophet (saws) from the early days.

The fact that such a person could raise an army of people who considered themselves Muslims to fight against Imam Ali (as) shows how drastically the moral values and situation of the Islamic *Ummah* had deteriorated. Knowledge of good and bad had become inverted, and the truth had become so blurred and contaminated with falsehood that it became indistinguishable to the followers of Mu'awiyah. This shows how successful he had become in using his devious propaganda to manipulate the new converts and laity of Syria (*Sham*), mobilizing them into fighting their own brothers, without facing serious opposition. This miserable situation forced honest, decent people, especially those with power and influence, to participate in and commit themselves to the political struggle and, as it was of Mu'awiyah's making, it reveals his treachery and danger to

Islam. One of the key figures around this time was Muhammad bin Abi Bakr, the son of the first Caliph, and the brother of Um-ul-Mu'mineen 'Aiy'shah.

The presence of Muhammad bin Abi Bakr amongst Ali's (as) companions linked the case of Ali to purity and innocence. As regards his association with those men who attempted to assassinate 'Uthman in his palace, historical records indicate that, when 'Uthman saw him amongst the assassins, he asked him what his father's reactions would have been had he still been alive and was witness to this act. At which point, Muhammad bin Abi Bakr stepped aside, and left without committing any act at all.

However Muhammad bin Abi Bakr assiduously participated in supporting Imam Ali (as), and in the political campaigns against Mu'awiyah's treachery. He wrote a letter to Mu'awiyah revealing his hypocrisy and his evil acts. The response to this letter was translated near the beginning of this chapter. A contemporary Western historian writes regarding this sensitive point:

The son of Abu Bakr also engaged, certainly before the battle of Siffin, in a public slanging match with Mu'awiyah, the text of which was suppressed by al-Tabari because, he suggested, the common people ('amma) would not bear hearing it. It was, however, preserved by al-Baldhuri and other sources. Muhammad b. Abi Bakr addressed Mu'awiyah as the Seducer (ghawi), son of Sakhr, and went on to compare him, the cursed son of the cursed, who had never failed to seek ruin for the religion of God and now was sheltering the remnants of the Confederates, with Ali, the first one to respond to the Prophet's summons to Islam, his brother and cousin, who was ever in the forefront of his followers, his legatee, and father of his offspring, who was now backed by the Ansar whom God had praised. Ibn Abi Bakr did not fail

to mention 'Amr b. al 'As, Mu'awiyah's partner in his game of fraud and deception. They would find out to whom the lofty outcome would belong; God was watching Mu'awiyah.

Mu'awiyah, no doubt assisted by 'Amr, answered in kind. He addressed his letter to the detractor from his own father: Muhammad, son of Abu Bakr. Having spotted the weak point in Muhammad's family record with respect to the legatee of the Prophet, he hammered away at it. In Muhammad's discourse, he said, there was rebuke of his father: 'Stone him, after He had completed for him what He had promised him and had made manifest his summons and victorious his argument, He took him to Himself. Then your father and Faruq ['Umar] were the first to snatch it [the succession] (intazzahu) and to oppose him. On that, the two of them agreed and cooperated. Then they summoned him to themselves, but he was slow, keeping away from them and tarrying in relation to them. At that time both had designs against him and intended great offence (arada lahu l-'azim), but he pledged allegiance and surrendered to them. They would not let him share in their reign, nor did they make him privy to their secret until they died and their rule passed away. Then their third one rose after them, 'Uthman b. 'Affan, following in their straight path, and acting in accordance with their conduct, but you and your master blamed him until the remotest of the sinful people would covet his life. You both concealed and displayed your hatred and your spite until you attained your desires in regard to him.'

Mu'awiyah went on to ridicule the son of Abu Bakr who would challenge a giant of political wisdom (hilm) such as himself, whose reign Muhammad's father, Abu Bakr, had facilitated, built, and raised to lofty heights.

'If what we are about is not sound, then your father was the first one to be about it. If it was injustice, then your father founded it, and we are his partners. We followed his guidance and imitated his action. If your father had not preceded us to it and considered him unsuitable for the rule, we would not oppose Ibn Abi Talib and would submit to him. But,

since we saw your father do that, we follow his example and imitate his action. So blame your father as you see fit or quit.' [98]

I believe that Mu'awiyah was cunning enough to realize and highlight the weak points of Muhammad bin Abi Bakr's account. Although Mu'awiyah was right in many of his points and analysis, Muhammad bin Abi Bakr, as a matter of respect, was nevertheless fully aware of how astutely he should address him in order to avoid even a single reference to his father's part in the historical past.

On another occasion, in a letter drunk with the praises of the first three Caliphs, Mu'awiyah displayed his manipulative skills yet again by taunting Imam Ali (as) with accusations of jealousy and of eagerly awaiting opportunities to seize the caliphate.

Ali (as) responded with his famous letter to Mu'awiyah. As well as highlighting Mu'awiyah's mischief, it throws ample light on many phases of Islamic history, from the time of its dawn to the time of Imam Ali's (a) reign. He wrote:

Your condition is like that of a man who carries dates to the date-growing districts, or who tries to teach archery to the master from whom he has learnt the art. You believe that the best of the people amongst the Muslims are so and so, and you have started discussing a subject (superiority of Muhajirs over Ansar) which, if it is proved correct, will not be of any use to you, and will not enhance your status, and, if it is repudiated, this repudiation will not harm you because you are neither a Muhajir nor an Ansar.
What have you to do with their respective status and prestige? What is it for you if one is considered superior to the other? How are you considered in their affairs? You are a freed and liberated slave, and slaves and their sons, though freed and liberated, cannot aspire to the

status of Muhajirs and Ansar and they have no right to introduce unholy classification amongst the Muhajirs and Ansar. Do you realize your limitations? You do not belong to either group, you are a liberated slave and son of liberated parents, and you want to introduce an unhealthy division between these two groups.

The false status you have tried to grasp is not going to enhance your prestige (before Allah or the people). Can you not think of remaining at the place where your old hostility towards Islam and the Holy Prophet (s) has kept you? How is the lower status or defeat of one class or a person of that class to whom you do not belong going to harm you, and how is the success, or higher status, of the other going to do you good? You have deviated from the straight path and from the real teachings of Islam. Listen! I want to give you a short description of the Blessings of Allah upon us.

A party of Muhajirs met martyrdom. They were killed in the cause of Islam and Allah. Every one of them was blessed by Allah with a status and rank. Out of them, those who belonged to my family and tribe, Bani Hashim, were granted an excellent status by Allah. Hamza (the uncle of the Holy Prophet (s) and of Imam Ali (a)) received the title of Chief of Martyrs (Sayyid al-Shuhada). The Holy Prophet (s) himself called him by this name after his martyrdom and at his funeral ceremony.

The Holy Prophet (s) recited Takbir ('Allahu Akbar') seventy times as a mark of distinction for him, one which is not for any other Muslim. Some Muhajirs lost their hands in the battlefield but when one of us (Ja'far, cousin of the Holy Prophet (s) and brother of Imam Ali (a)) lost both of his hands and died in the battlefield, Allah granted him angelic wings and the Holy Prophet (s) informed us that this martyr received the title of Tayyar (one who flies in Paradise). If Allah had not disapproved of man's habit of eulogizing and praising himself, I would have given several such instances which speak of the enhancement of my prestige and status before Allah; instances which are accepted and can be testified by faithful Muslims about which the hearers will have no

reason to doubt. Do not be like a man whom the Devil has led astray. Accept the obvious truth when it faces you.

Listen O Mu'awiyah! We (Ahlul Bayt, the progeny of the Holy Prophet (s)) are unique examples of the creation of Allah. For such a status, we are not under obligation to any person or tribe but to Almighty Allah who granted us these blessings. Human beings have received and will receive perfection through us. The perpetual supremacy and inherent superiority do not prevent us from making contact with human beings or with your clan; we have married amongst you and have established family connections with your clan (as well as with others), though you do not belong to our class. How can you be our equal when the Holy Prophet (s) belongs to us and Abu Jahl, the worst enemy of Islam was from amongst you?

Asadullah *(lit. 'the Lion of Allah' – a title of Imam Ali (a)) is from amongst us, while* Asadul Ahlaaf *('Lion of the Opposing Groups', who had sworn to fight against Islam and the Holy Prophet (s)) was from you.*

The two foremost leaders of the youth of Paradise (Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a)) are from us and the children of Hell are from you. The best woman in the world (title bestowed by Allah upon Fatimah (as)) the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet (s) is from us, and the slanderer and the wood-carrying woman who tried to spend every hour of her life in doing harm to the Holy Prophet of Islam (s), was your aunt. There are so many other things similar to these mentioned few, which praise us and speak ill of your clan, and which show how far and superior we are to you.

We were faithful followers of the commandments of Allah, and you and your clan always opposed Islam and accepted it out of sheer expediency simply to save yourselves from humiliation and disgrace.

Our sincerity in Islam and our services to its cause are the facts of history, and history cannot deny your enmity against Islam and the Holy Prophet (s).

The credit which you want to take away from us and the honour from which you want to deprive us is that which the Holy Qur'an is carefully guarding for us. It says: 'Some relatives are superior and have excellence over others, according to the Book of Allah' [Qur'an, 33:6] and in another place in the very same Book, Allah informs humanity that: 'The nearest people to Ibrahim are those who follow him and those who follow the Holy Prophet (s) and the true believers. Allah is the guardian of the true believers' [Qur'an, 2:68]. Therefore, we hold two excellences: That of close relationship to the Holy Prophet (s) and that of loyally accepting his teachings. Do you know on the day of Saqifah, Muhajirs told Ansar that they were superior to them because they, in one way or the other, were related to the Holy Prophet (s) and therefore they deserved the caliphate, and with the aid of this argument, the Muhajirs carried the day?

If success can be achieved with the help of this argument, and if it has got a grain of truth in it then according to it we, and not you, deserve the caliphate. If not, then the Ansar still hold their claim over the caliphate.

You want to impress the world with the idea that I envied all the previous caliphs and that I was jealous of them. Even if I grant this, I want to know what right and authority you have to ask for an explanation from me. You have no place in religion to talk of such things. You also want to taunt me by saying that when I refused to accept the caliphate of the First Caliph I was dragged like a camel with a rope around my neck, and every kind of cruelty and humiliation was levelled against me. I swear, by my life, that by talking like that, you want to bring disgrace to me but you are actually doing the greatest service to me and are disgracing yourself as well as the cause that you pretend to support.

There is no disgrace for a Muslim if he is subjected to tyranny and suppression so long as he is firm in his faith and belief in Allah and religion. This is exactly what I say – that every cruelty and tyranny was levelled against me to deprive me of the right which Allah and the Holy Prophet (s) have given me, and this is exactly what you do not want to

acknowledge and accept. Your taunts against me go a long way to prove that, in reality, there was no election; it was a coup d'etat followed by brutal force which decided the fate of caliphate by making it neither hereditary nor elective but possessive. I had no desire to go into these details but you brought up the subject and I am forced to explain a few points about it.

Then you have referred to the murder of 'Uthman, and declaring yourself to be his relative, you claim vengeance and blood (and want me to arrange for it as if I was responsible for the murder). I want to say something about the insinuation and false propaganda carried out by you in this respect.

My reply to you is that, first of all, you should try and find out who the arch-enemy of 'Uthman was. Can the arch-enemy be he who offered his help and services to 'Uthman and whom 'Uthman refused to have anything to do with, telling him plainly to go and sit at home, as his help was not required and his services were not needed, or is the worst enemy of 'Uthman he whom 'Uthman asked to come to his succour and who purposely and intentionally delayed help, allowing events to build up to their inevitable conclusion? No, these two persons cannot be considered in the same category. I swear by the Omniscient Allah that He knows everything very well; as He says in the Holy Book, 'Allah certainly knows the people who put obstacles in the path of those who wanted to go to war and also those who did not stay to face a battle.' [Qur'an, 33:18].

I do not want to offer any excuse for having objected to his introducing innovations in religion. If my objections to the introduction of innovation and my advice to him to relinquish it was considered by him a sin on my part, then I do not attach any importance to his opinion, because well-wishers are often blamed and their good advice misconstrued, though they do their duty to man and religion. Allah, in the Holy Book, repeats the saying of a prophet that appropriately represents my position. He says, 'I only intend to reform you as much as

I can. My success lies with Allah. I have faith in Him and trust in His help.' [Qur'an, 11:88].
Then you have tried to frighten me by saying that there is nothing with you for me and my companions but your sword. Well, Mu'awiyah! You made the people laugh at your words; they were feeling very sad and depressed at the standard of mental depravity exhibited by you.
When did you find the sons of Abdul Muttalib (the grandfather of the Holy Prophet (s) and Imam Ali (a)) timid in facing their enemies or afraid of brandishing swords?
Just wait a little; in the not-too-distant future, you will have to face the attack of a brave soldier. He will shortly invite you to the encounter you desire. The thing that you apparently wish for is not as far away as you imagine it to be. I am coming towards you with an army of Muhajirs, Ansar, and those companions who have sincere faith in me. Theirs is a powerful congregation. Their movements will raise huge clouds of dust (indicating the strength of the army). They are prepared to die or to kill. They believe that the best that could happen to them is to receive the blessings of the Lord by their good deeds. Sons of those warriors who routed your clan in the Battle of Badr are with them.
The swords of Bani Hashim are with them. And you have already realized the sharpness of these swords when your brother, your maternal uncle, your grandfather and kinsmen were killed (those people were killed by Imam Ali (a) in the battles of Badr and Uhud). These swords are now nearing the despots who have tyrannized the Muslim world.[99]

We have quoted the whole letter because it casts extensive light on various issues. Imam Ali (as) mentioned, for example:

1. The classification of the different groups of Muslim society; i.e., *Muhajireen* and *Ansar*: He reminded Mu'awiyah that he could not manipulate people with the same cause as

the first three Caliphs. When the first Caliphs themselves misused the argument, he would never be successful in pursuing it. It is for this reason that he then went on to remind him that he was one of the*Tulaqa'*, the freed slaves, set free by the Prophet (saws) after he had conquered Mecca. There is an astute reminder of his evil past in fighting against Islam and the Prophet of Allah (saws), which contrasts with the *Ahlul Bayt*, who have a bright history, unblemished in their support of Islam and its Prophet (saws). This should have been enough to remind him that he should, therefore, not go beyond his limits, as one of the *Tulaqa'*. He followed this by bringing up the superiority of the *Ahlul Bayt* over other Muslims, outlining the cases of Hamza and Ja'far, amongst others, in an intelligent way. These examples were mentioned not for the sake of pride, but in order to remind Mu'awiyah, and to elucidate, for historical record, that the *Ahlul Bayt* belong to that elevated position of piety and purity, whereas their enemy belongs to that low-level class of the enemy of Allah (swt), the Qur'an, and Allah's Prophet (saws). Any attempt at considering them equal would be an enormous mistake.

2. The unjust matters: He referred to the unjust matters done to him, and defended himself in that it was an honour, not a disgrace, for a person to be subjected to these injustices, as long as he was of firm belief and knowledge that he had not committed an evil act. He therefore confirmed, and was not able to deny, the oppression that he and his family had been through, and I understand that this is a confirmation of what he had lived through in the early days of the first Caliphs. While acknowledging these unpleasant facts, he considered them an honour. He then followed by saying that these things complied with his claims of being deprived of his rights, and remarked that Mu'awiyah was following in their footsteps and trying to do the same thing.

3. The warning of war: He brought up the subject of war, as Mu'awiyah had attempted to frighten him. His reply was a clear and concise message that expressed the fact that Mu'awiyah and his grandfathers had already tasted the touch of the blades of the swords of Bani Hashim, and he should, therefore, anticipate a similar encounter in the very near future.

Those words from Mu'awiyah were, indeed, a declaration of war, and it did not take long before he launched the battle of Siffin, a heavy battle, which started in the year 71-72 A.H.. It was a long and controversial conflict. During the course of one of its days, Ali (as) stood in the middle of the battlefield and called out to Mua'wiyah, asking him if he accused him of being responsible for the murder of 'Uthman, and telling him that if this was the case to let the matter be resolved between the two of them personally, since he was already on the battlefield and could meet him alone; the affair could thus be settled without shedding any more blood of the Muslims.

'Amr bin 'As listened to the proposal and addressed Mu'awiyah saying, 'He was just with you; why didn't you accept his offer?' Of course, Mu'awiyah, knowing his greedy friend, replied that he knew that no one could stand up to Ali (as) or survive him on the battlefield and this was why he refused.
The fact is that on the battlefield Imam Ali (as) and his party were close to winning the war, and when Mu'awiyah detected his dangerous and critical position, he called 'Amr bin 'As to him, and consulted with him in order to find a way out of the dilemma. 'Amr came up with a divisive and deceitful trick *(Tahkeem Al-Qur'an)*, which was to raise copies of the Qur'an as a sign to both parties for restoration to the verdict and judgement of the Qur'an.

I believe that this historical moment marked the beginning of the reverse of Imam Ali's (as) advantage, and the start of the countdown to his fiasco. His flourishing hope, and promising future of victory in the political field swerved, and began to about-turn from this moment stamped with doom.

Imam Ali (as) rejected this ruse and described it 'an evil trick'. However some of Imam Ali's (as) soldiers apparently either failed to realize the devious nature of the idea, or were simply frightened of carrying on with the war. A clear tendency towards accepting the suggestion rapidly formed and this group stood against Imam Ali's (as) rejection of the ploy. This group later became referred to as the *Khawaarij*.

It is clear that being faced with such huge resistance is an absolutely negative sign in a war, so Imam Ali (as) reluctantly agreed, after making clear that it was only a trick and as such would certainly fail. A contemporary Western historian also marked the important significance of this devious plan and wrote:

There was plainly a deplorable lapse in Ali's leadership at this trying but crucial time. He permitted the majority of his army to impose their will on him as if he were a tribal shaykh, as implied in his quotation of Durayd b. al-Simma, rather than the Commander of the Faithful. It is true that the raising of the Qur'an copies by the Syrians put him in a difficult position. He could not simply ignore the gesture and had to ascertain its significance. [100]

We disagree with this scholar's claim that Ali (as) acted in the manner of a tribal shaykh, as Ali (as) did not actually function in the way that a tribal shaykh would. The fact is, as we have already mentioned a few lines above, is that the people were frightened, alarmed, or in some other way

controlled by the propaganda of this deceitful trick. A rejection of an apparent call for peace and to the judgment of the Qur'an, especially when one is threatened by the majority of the swords of his own army, would certainly have spelled political suicide, as it could have led to a mutinous battle between the soldiers of his own army. Consequently, his decision, far from being based on tribal influence, was rather the result of wise administration. His opponents were all too easily influenced by these ignorant but very devious methods. It would have been easy for him to reject this deceptive trick had he been able to depend on the loyalty of his supporters. As this was not the case, and the opponents' party represented the majority, he had no other alternative, in the complicated situation, but to comply with their demands. The contemporary Western historian also writes:

In the face of the strong peace sentiments of (the) majority of his army, Ali decided to accept, against his own judgement, the arbitration proposal. His public display of reluctance merely strengthened the resolve of the peace party who, after initial victory, felt now in a position to dictate the terms. Ali evidently was convinced that the Arbitration would fail, and put up little resistance. Two groups of Qur'an readers of both sides first met between the lines to discuss the procedure. They agreed to 'revive what the Qur'an revived and to deaden with the Qur'an deadened'. The Syrians then proposed 'Amr b. Hisn al-Ta'I and Mis'arb Fadaki proposed Abu Musa al-Ash'ari. When Ali objected (saying) that he did not wish to nominate Abu Musa, they countered that they would not be satisfied with anyone but him since he had warned them of what they had fallen into. The discussion thus turned into open criticism of Ali's previous war policy. Ali pointed out that he would not trust Abu Musa, who had opposed him, had encouraged the people to desert him, and then had fled from him. Only after some months had Ali granted him some pardon. He proposed

appointing 'Abd Allah b. al-'Abbas. They answered that there was no difference between him and Ibn al-'Abbas; they wanted someone who was equally distant from both Ali and Mu'awiyah. Ali now proposed al-Ashtar. Al-Ash'ath reacted strongly against his Yemenite rival: 'Is there anyone but al-Ashtar who has set the earth aflame?' It was al-Ashtar's judgement, he asserted, that had pitted the Muslims against each other with their swords in order to achieve Ali's and his own desires.

Ali now gave in, and Abu Musa, who was living in retreat at 'Urd, between Tadmur and al-Rusafa in Syrian territory, was sent for. Abu Musa readily accepted his role as arbitrator. Both al-Ashtar and al-Ahnaf b. Qays vainly tried to persuade Ali to change his mind. Al-Ashtar suggested that he was the man to block 'Amr's designs and was prepared to kill him. Al-Ahnaf argued that Abu Musa was indecisive and superficial, no match for a wily opponent such as 'Amr. If Ali did not want to appoint him, al-Ahnaf, arbitrator, he should put him at least in second or third place so that he could untie the knots that 'Amr would try to tie, and that he would tie firmer knots for Ali. Yet the peace party wanted none but Abu Musa.

As the text of the arbitration agreement was drawn up, another problem arose. Mu'awiyah objected to the title 'Commander of the Faithful' being attached to Ali's name, remarking that if he, Mu'awiyah, recognized Ali to be Commander of the Faithful, he would not have fought him. 'Amr, who was visiting Ali's camp for the negotiations, proposed that only the name and the father's names be mentioned, since Ali was (reluctant to) omit the title since he feared (that) if he omitted it now he would never get it back. Rather than allowing that, the people should resume fighting. Ali thus at first on that day refused to remove the title. Then al-Ash'ath asked him to omit it since God would not want distress to be caused by it. Ali agreed, recalling the precedent set by Muhammad at al-Hudaybiyya when he allowed the title 'Messenger of God' to be omitted from the treaty on the demand of the polytheists. 'Amr pretended to be offended: 'Praise the Lord; in this example we are

likened to the infidels, yet we are believers. Ali told him: "Ibn al-Nabigha, when were you anything but a friend to the reprobate and an enemy to the Muslim? Are you not just like your [slave] mother who bore you?' 'Amr rose and said: 'No assembly room will ever bring me and you together again after this day.' Ali: 'Surely, I hope that God will cleanse my assembly room from you and the likes of you.' [101]

The reminder as quoted by Ali (as) regarding the event of the Prophet (saws) is indeed narrated in many historical sources. However, this event differs slightly in the circumstances surrounding it. The Prophet (saws) was not forced to accept the peace treaty; rather he accepted the proposal as he was fully aware that peace would provide a wonderful opportunity for the spread and strengthening of Islam's foundation. He was also surrounded by many supporters. As an example, we noticed that Imam Ali (as), who was present during the negotiations, refused to remove the title *(Rasulu Allah)*. We have noticed in this case that Imam Ali (as) did not accept the *Tahkeem*, and he was obviously forced to comply with the Khawarij dictates. In addition, during this occasion, Ali (as) was alone and the opposite happened when Al-Asha'th urged him to remove it. These two points highlight the main difference between the two historical events, and it is due to these differences that *Al-Hudaybiah* was a step forward towards the victory of the Prophet's (saws) party, while the second, *Tahkeem*, marked a countdown towards Imam Ali's (sa) party's decline, which he foresaw in advance. Imam Ali (as)'s compliance did not mean that he was unaware of the primitive nature of Abu Musa and his being easily manipulated. Although he emphasized his isolation and desertion during the war, he nevertheless knew about him and therefore warned about the *Tahkeem's* failure.

This scholar writes further about the *Tahkeem*:

The arbitration agreement was written and signed in duplicate on Wednesday, 15 Safar 37/2 August 657, four days after the cessation of hostilities. It reflected primarily the sentiments of the peace party. The two sides committed themselves to adhere to the book of God. The two arbitrators, who were named, were to follow strictly the rules of the Qur'an. Wherever they would not find a rule for in the Qur'an, they were to apply 'the just, uniting and not dividing, Sunnah, evidently meaning good practice acceptable to both sides. What they were to judge was not specified. They were bound, however, to judge among the Community rightly so as not to throw them into division and war. This was obviously the primary concern of the peace party, who were otherwise prepared to give the arbitrators a free hand. They were to make their judgment by Ramadan, seven months after the agreement, but might either advance or defer the date. However the text of the various versions disagree on whether the date could only be advanced or only deferred or both. [102]

One can easily uncover the contradiction within the basis of the principles agreed by the arbitrators. Of course, the Qur'an, as a valid source for guidance, is unquestionable, however the main problem lies in the very way the Qur'an should be interpreted. Without a doubt, the authority as to who should be enquired of in different matters was open to discussion, and was not clearly stated in the agreement – and here lies the quintessence of the conflict. The Sunnah, on the other hand, was again limited to what is not divisive but rather unifying, and if there were no different versions of how to understand the Sunnah, the battle of Siffin could never have happened from the very start. Anyway, it is also clear that Mu'awiyah's choice of 'Amr bin 'As for this arbitration is another sign of the deceitful goal they followed. From the first, 'Amr bin 'As' priority was to establish the nature of 'Uthman's killing as unjust. If this

case were to be declared unjust, then the first step for the realization of their goals would be secured, as it was the demise of 'Uthman that naturally led to the election of a new Caliph, and in this case it led to Imam Ali's (as) election for caliphate. The second step is entirely insignificant. Madelung also writes in this regard:

The verdict that 'Uthman was killed wrongfully thus was a political deal, not based on a judicial investigation. Abu Musa presumably justified it in his mind with the argument already used by 'Aiy'shah that 'Uthman had repented of any wrongdoing he had committed. A judicial explanation, however, would first have had to establish whether Niyar 'the Evil' had been wrongfully killed, for 'Uthman's violent death had been precipitated by the murder of Niyar. It is true that either the murderer of his master Marwan would have been subject to the lex talionis *rather than 'Uthman, who was probably opposed to the murder. In this sense, it could be held that 'Uthman had not been rightfully killed. He had, however, prevented legal retaliation by refusing to investigate the murder, presumably aware or suspecting that his cousin Marwan was behind it. Ali's judgment that 'Uthman's violent death was neither wrongful nor rightful thus was substantially correct. Abu Musa should have been particularly wary of agreeing to a blank declaration of 'Uthman's innocence since the proposal came from 'Amr, the foremost agitator against 'Uthman and the first target of al-Walid b. 'Uqba's vendetta. He was probably naïve enough to believe that 'Amr now sincerely regretted his former conduct. The sentence, judicially a misjudgement, became political and, for Sunnites, religious dogma with disastrous long-term effects for Islam.*

Once the initial agreement on 'Uthman's innocence had been reached, it was 'Amr's strategy to block any agreement on either Ali retaining the caliphate or on a shura. He probably did not press the case for a caliphate of Mu'awiyah seriously at this point, since the latter had not yet put forward a formal claim. A shura, as favoured by Abu Musa,

would have meant electing one of the neutrals. This might at this time still have been acceptable to Mu'awiyah, but only if his permanent rule of Syria was guaranteed. Such a guarantee could obviously not be given by Abu Musa. It was thus best to let the negotiations collapse. The agreement that 'Uthman had been killed wrongfully would, 'Amr trusted, cause further division among Ali's followers and dissuade any of the pious neutrals from turning to his side.[103]

It was a deceptive plan that was designed to accommodate all the malevolent machinations in Mu'awiyah's mind without losing any of the benefit of having Ali (as) at the negotiation table. Whatever the outcome might be, another opportunity was provided for rebuilding their army and preparing for a second battle should negotiation fail in achieving more divisions within Ali's (as) party. It is also somewhat probable that, after being elected by the majority of Kufans, Abu Musa was considered neutral, and was therefore calculating that he would be one of the best candidates for the caliphate if the *shura* business subsequently succeeded.

The arbitration failed and the deceit of Mu'awiyah's party is obvious, as regardless of the primitiveness and simplicity of Abu Musa, his claims of the other party's cheating and lying were more likely to be believed than not. Imam Ali (as), despite knowing the outcome of such arbitration, was annoyed. It is narrated in '*Nahjul Balagha*' that Imam Ali (as) said the following about the two arbitrators, Abu Musa al-Ash`ari and 'Amr ibn al 'Asm and the disparagement of the Syrians:

Rude, low people and mean slaves. They have been collected from all sides and picked up from every pack. They need to be taught the tenets (of Islam), disciplined, instructed, trained, supervised, and led by the

hand. They are neither muhajirun (immigrants from Mecca), nor ansar (helpers of Madinah), nor those who made their dwellings in the abode (in Madinah) and in belief.
Look! They have chosen for themselves one who is nearest to what they desire, while you have chosen one who is nearest to what you dislike. You may certainly recall that the other day 'Abdullah ibn Qays (Abu Musa) was saying, 'It is a mischief; therefore, cut away your bow-string and sheathe your swords.' If he was right (in what he said) then he was wrong in marching (with us) without being forced, but if he was lying then he should be viewed with suspicion. Therefore, send 'Abdullah ibn al-'Abbas to face 'Amr ibn al-'As. Make use of these days and surround the borders of Islam. Do you not see that your cities are being attacked and your prowess is being targeted? [104]

It seems that this case was an ongoing process, and people paid no attention to the guidance of Imam Ali (as). The arbitration went as Ibn 'As had desired, and Abu Musa was naïve enough to cause the party he should have assiduously represented to experience a big failure.

The same scholar writes in this regard:

When Ibn al-'Abbas and Shurayh reported to Ali, he denounced the conduct of both arbitrators. Preaching to the Kufans, he reminded them of his warnings about both men and the arbitration; now these two arbitrators, whom they had chosen, had thrown the rule of the Qur'an behind their backs, had judged without sound argument or accepted precedent, and in the end had disagreed between themselves. He called on his followers to prepare to march to Syria and to assemble in their military camp on Monday. As it became known that Mu'awiyah had accepted the oath of allegiance as Caliph, Ali broke off all relations and correspondence with him. He introduced a curse on Mu'awiyah, 'Amr, Abul-A'war al-Sumali, Habib b. Maslama, 'Adb al-Rahman b. Khalid

b. al-Walid, al-Dahhak b. Qays, and al-Walid b. 'Uqba in the invocation of the morning prayer (qunut). *This followed the practice of Muhammad of calling a curse upon some of his enemies in the* qunut. *Mu'awiyah retaliated by introducing a curse on Ali, Ibn 'Abbas, al-Ashtar, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn.*[105]

He stated the reason for the failure of the arbitrators was on account of the fact that they had revived what the Qur'an had declared dead, and destroyed what the Qur'an wanted to revive. We have seen in his sermon quoted above that Imam Ali (as) was complaining about the way his companions had handled the case, while the Syrians had chosen the best way for their cheating goals. He concluded by saying that they should call and apply their religious feeling, referring to the attacks of the Syrians on their cities. The Syrians' attacks on the cities of the territories that were under Ali's (as) protection had since increased. There were many attacks and one of the most notorious of them was Busr Ibn Artat's assault on Hidjaz and Yemen. Busr Ibn Artat, a ruthless criminal, was ordered by Mu'awiyah to massacre Ali Shi'ite Muslims anywhere he could find them. The reason why Busr had been dispatched was that the 'Uthmanids living in Yemen had revolted against their governor, 'Ubayd Allah Ibn 'Abbas, after detecting weakness in the Iraqi troops. They had written to Mu'awiyah seeking military support. First Busr entered Madinah, whose governor, Abu Ayyub Ansari, had been appointed by Ali (as). Having no troops, he had no choice but to flee. Busr razed his house to the ground and set fire to other homes in the process, secured allegiance from people through the extremities of force, designated Abu Hurayra, and sent him to Mecca. Qutham Ibn 'Abbas left and fled. Busr then set out to Ta'if, where he sent a man from Quraysh to Tabala, where many Shi'ah Muslims resided. At his command all were slain and their possessions were plundered. Panic-stricken

residents of Mecca had to flee; among them were 'Ubayd Allah Ibn 'Abbas's wife and two sons, Sulayman and Dawud. The sons were captured and both were beheaded. It is said that they were murdered in Yemen and concealed in the house of a man who had been born in Iran. Resuming his trip, he went to Nadjran where he killed 'Ubayd Allah Ibn 'Abbas's father in law, 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abd al-Muddan. This very event is considerable in Mu'awiyah's shameful political life.[106] In general, these attacks served the achievement of several goals.

1. Creating the impression that Ali (as) was not the powerful Caliph on whom the Muslims should rely or they would not have to suffer from his leadership in this miserable way.
2. As Mu'awiyah was in need of extending his empire to new turf, by attacking different lands that were under Ali's (as) control, he could pave the way for control of these lands in the future. They also provided a wonderful source of wealth as his soldiers were confiscating money and valuables from the people.
3. There were many Shi'ah and supporters of Imam Ali (as), and through these attacks, many of his committed supporters were killed. In addition there had been a resistance from the 'Uthmani party, and by these attacks they raced to their help before Imam Ali (as) could have done anything to resist them.

From these events, we understand that Mu'awiyah's party worked as a cooperative foundation and as a network, as they could choose the correct timing to rebel and to work together. One of these rebellions was the revolt of the Egyptian people. Muhammad bin abi Bakr had been sent as governor for the Egyptians. However, his politics did not seem to be supported by the laity and Mu'awiyah sent troops to help the 'Uthmanids. 'Amr Ibn al 'As who had

previously led the army of the Arabs in the conquest of Egypt, advanced with a massive army. In a letter, he warned Muhammad to surrender if he wanted to remain secure. Another threatening letter was sent, this time by Mu'awiyah, stating that he knew of no other enemy to 'Uthman but Muhammad, so the time was ripe for a reprisal. Writing to the Imam, Muhammad enclosed the two letters. Imam recommended that he resist and ordered him to send Kiana Ibn Bishr (the one who allegedly hit 'Uthman on the head with a mace) to Damascus, accompanied by an army, but to remain behind in the city with another army. Kiana left with two thousand soldiers and Muhammad stayed on the alert with the same number of troops. In brave clashes with the Damascus army, Kiana was martyred along with his troops. Muhammad, who was left behind in Egypt, took refuge in some ruins. The commander of the vanguard of the army was Mu'awiyah Ibn Khydaydi, who tracked Muhammad down, murdered him, beheaded him, stuffed his body inside a carcass, and then set light to it. It was the policy used by Mu'awiyah and his followers in the martyring of religious figures under the pretext of 'Uthman's murder. The story of how he was killed is merciless and brutal. Yet in Mu'awiyah's view Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr's murder was considered a triumph for the 'Uthmanids around the globe.[107]

As soon as the Imam was told, he became so disconsolate that he addressed the people of Kufah in very strong tones. In this sermon he pointed out: 'It has exceeded fifty days since I asked for help. After such a long period of time, the recruited army is the least mighty one.'[108]

Now Damascus had gained access to Egypt, which was not only adjacent to Damascus but also had many from among the 'Uthmanids who could back the Damascus army. In addition, it was time to fulfil the promise that Mu'awiyah

had given to the cunning 'Amr Ibn al 'As: the governorship of Egypt, after the murder of Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr. [109] Egypt, which was now out of the Imam's hand for only three or four years, was then ruled by 'Amr Ibn al 'As as late as his death in 43.

From the account of Imam Ali's (as) immigration from Madinah to Kufah, we have seen that, although he left his close friends and all those who knew him in Madinah and Mecca, he developed a great history, which demonstrates the significance of his role in the Islamic world. His ethical and scientific background, as well as his devotion during his life to Islam, led people to rise up and help him. The Prophet's (saws) disciples and his own close followers joining his army added to his might and allowed no one to overcome him for a time. But after the issue of arbitration was broached in Siffin, they found a justification for standing against Imam Ali (a), and after suppressing the Kharidjites, under the pretext of fatigue, they drew back from internal affairs and formed, or perhaps more appropriately 'invented', a new sect within Islam, called till the present day, *Khawarij*; and their battle with Imam Ali (as) is called *Nahrawan*.[110]

4. Nahrawan

Khawarij could not cope with the result of their choice to arbitrate. Though realizing it was their mistake to accept and appoint Abu Musa for arbitration, they accused both Imam Ali and Mu'awiyah of being disbelievers. They formed their own group and opposed Imam Ali (as) and whoever publicly supported him. They left Kufah and later became very dangerous and aggressive. They encountered, for example, Abdullah bin Khabab bin Art, a pious companion

of the Prophet (saws), whose father was tortured by the polytheists during the early days of Islam, and asked him to declare Ali (as) a disbeliever. When he refused, they killed him along with his wife. She was pregnant; they showed no mercy towards her, and once she was killed, they cut out her womb and ripped out the baby, and killed it too. These criminal acts were committed solely because these individuals were not willing to declare Imam Ali (as) a disbeliever.

Imam Ali then decided to fight the Khawarij, if they were unwilling to repent, seek justice, and accept rule and order. He tried to guide them; it is narrated that in one of his sermons he said:

If you do not cease believing that I have gone wrong and been misled, why do you consider that the common men among the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (saws) have gone astray like me, and accuse them with my mistake, and hold them unbelievers on account of my sins. You are holding your swords on your shoulders and using them rightly and wrongly. You are confusing those who have committed sins with those who have not. You know that the Prophet (saws) stoned the protected (married) adulterer, but then he also said his burial prayer and allowed his successors to inherit from him. He killed the murderer and allowed his successors to inherit from him. He amputated (the hand of) the thief and whipped the unprotected (unmarried) adulterer, but thereafter allowed their shares from the booty, and they married Muslim women. Thus, the Prophet (saws) took them to ask for their sins and also abided by Allah's commands about them, but did not disallow them their rights created by Islam, nor did he remove their names from its followers.
Certainly, you are the most evil of all persons and are those whom Satan has put on his lines and thrown out into his wayless land. With regard to me, two categories of people will be ruined, namely he who loves me too much and the love takes him away from rightfulness, and

he who hates me too much and the hatred takes him away from rightfulness. The best man with regard to me is he who is on the middle course. So be with him and be with the great majority (of Muslims) because Allah's hand (of protection) is on keeping unity. You should beware of division because the one isolated from the group is (a prey) to Satan just as the one isolated from the flock of sheep is (a prey) to the wolf.

Beware; whoever calls to this course, kill him, even though he may be under this headband of mine. Certainly, the two arbitrators were appointed to revive what the Qur'an revives and to destroy what the Qur'an destroys. Revival means to unite on it (in a matter) and destruction means to divide on a matter. If the Qur'an drives us to them, we should follow them, and if it drives them to us, they should follow up. May you have no father! (Woe to you;) I did not cause you any misfortune, nor have I deceived you in any matter, nor created any confusion. Your own group had unanimously suggested in favour of these two men and we bound them that they would not exceed the Qur'an, but they deviated from it and abandoned the right although both of them were conversant with it. This wrongdoing was the dictate of their hearts and so they trod upon it, although we had stipulated that in arbitrating with justice and sticking to rightfulness they would avoid the evil of their own views and the mischief of their own verdict (but since this has happened the award is not acceptable to us).[111]

In this sermon, he analyzed the post-arbitration period, and he condemned the unwise attitudes of the Khawarij. He commenced with criticizing their extreme judgment of people, in that they accused him and all the Muslims of being disbelievers. He criticized this attitude from different angles:

1. It was precisely because their judgments were not moderate that they were accusing him of being a disbeliever. He did not accept this extremist attitude of theirs, despite

being committed against the third Caliph, as this mentality of theirs had prevented them from burying the latter at an appropriate time and place, after he was killed. He therefore reminded them about how the Prophet (saws) was moderate when he himself had washed the bodies of some Muslims who had served the death sentence, and he had put their bodies in coffins and prayed for them at their funerals.

2. He criticized the Khawarij's extreme blindness of judgment, as they were accusing him and other Muslims. If they alleged that he was an unbeliever, why did they have to include all the other Muslims of the community for being disbelievers too? It seemed to totally contradict Qur'anic principles.

3. He declared how the arbitrators' work had an invalid result, as they had agreed to revive what the Qur'an has revived and destroy what the Qur'an has destroyed. Yet this revival and destruction may unite them and divide them on the same matter. So how would they follow the teachings of the Qur'an, if they did not agree who should be followed in interpreting the Qur'an. As one should follow the right path, there should be no groups; so he declared that the arbitrators had followed their own desires instead of the Qur'anic teaching; and as they had deviated from the Qur'anic teaching, the outcome was not binding on the Muslims.

4. It seems from his speech that he had also uncovered a dangerous streak in some of the people regarding their attitude to him; they either elevated him higher than his rightful position or the reverse. He accused this exaggerated love, on the one hand, for stripping his rightfulness away from him, and the hatred of reaching such levels that it, too, stole his rightfulness away from him. He emphasized that the one who is best is the one on the middle course, and that this would lead him to be with the majority of Muslims. This is another feature of the moderation we have just mentioned in the first point. I believe that the Khawarij had

arrived at their views as a result of many misleading premises but nevertheless, here, Imam Ali (as), in his astute evaluation of their intellectual problems, tried to guide them away from these disingenuous arguments and evil thoughts.

He tried his best to convince the majority of the Khawarij, and it is recorded in many historical sources that he sent Ibn 'Abbas as his ambassador, who tried his best to show them the error of their ways, with the result that many returned with remorse for what they had done. However, many stubborn individuals amongst them remained as antagonistic as before. These were the ones who ultimately died in the battle of Nahrawan.

After finishing the matter of the Khawarij, Imam Ali (as) was interested in resolving the unfinished business of the Syrians and of Mua'wiyyah. Warning neglectful people while at the same time demonstrating the vastness of his own knowledge, he is recorded as declaring in a sermon:

'O people who are (negligent of Allah but) not neglected (by Allah), and those who miss (doing good acts) but are to be caught: How is it that I see you becoming removed from Allah and becoming interested in others? You are like the camel whom the grazer drives to a disease-stricken pasture and a disastrous watering place. They are like beasts that are fed in order to be slaughtered, but they do not know what is intended for them. When they are treated well they think that day to be their whole life, and eating their fill to be their goal.
By Allah, if I wish, I can tell every one of you from where he has come, where he has to go and all his affairs, but I fear lest you abandon the Messenger of Allah – peace and blessing of Allah be upon him and his progeny – in my favour. I shall certainly convey these things to the selected ones who will remain safe from that fear. By Allah, Who deputed the Prophet with Right and distinguished him over creation, I

do not speak, save the truth. He (the Prophet) informed me of all this and also about the death of every one who dies, the salvation of every one who is granted salvation, and the consequences of this matter (the caliphate). He left nothing (that could) pass into my head without putting it in my ear and telling me about it.
O people! By Allah, I do not impel you to any obedience unless I practise it before you and do not restrain you from any disobedience unless I desist from it before you.'

Then Amir al-mu'minin continued on the method of his ruling, and grief over the martyrdom of his companions:

'O people! I have divulged to you advice which the prophets used to preach before their peoples, and I have conveyed to you what the vicegerents (of the prophets) conveyed to those coming after them. I tried to train you with my whip but you could not be straightened. I drove you with admonition but you did not acquire proper behaviour. May Allah deal with you! Do you want an Imam other than me to take you on the (right) path, and show you the correct way?
Beware, the things in this world which were forward have become things of the past, and those which were behind are going ahead. The virtuous people of Allah have made up their minds to leave and they have purchased, with a little perishable (pleasure) of this world, a lot of such (reward) in the next world that will remain. What loss did our brothers, whose blood was shed in Siffin, suffer by not being alive today? Only that they are not suffering, not choking on their swallowing, and not drinking turbid water. By Allah, surely, they have met Allah, and He has bestowed upon them their rewards and He has lodged them in safe houses after their (having suffered) fear.
Where are my brethren who took the (right) path and trod in rightness! Where is 'Ammar? Where is Ibn at-Tayyihan? Where is Dhu'sh-Shahadatayn? And where are others like them from among their

comrades who had pledged themselves to death and whose (severed) heads were taken to the wicked enemy?'

Then Amir al-mu'minin wiped his hand over his auspicious, honoured beard and wept for a long time, then continued:

'O my brothers, who recited the Qur'an and strengthened it, thought over their obligation and fulfilled it, revived the sunnah and destroyed innovation: When they were called to jihad they responded and trusted in their leader, then followed him.'

Then Amir al-mu'minin shouted at the top of his voice:

'Al-jihad, al-jihad *(fighting, fighting), O creatures of Allah! By Allah, I am mobilising the army today. He who desires to proceed towards Allah should come forward.'* [112]

From this sermon, we understand that Imam Ali (as) was both determined and decisive in regard to finishing the case of Mu'wiyah. In many other narrations, he stated that Mu'awiyah was more dangerous than the Khawarij, and explained the reason for this. He made it clear that the Khawarij were nothing but simple, primitive individuals, who may have gone astray but who were, nonetheless, nowhere as cunning and wicked as Mu'awiyah. Mu'awiyah was a man of evil, harbouring dishonest individuals and introducing devious plans on which he was considerably focused with a view to furthering his goals, whereas the Khawarij were clueless and had no idea what to do. To sum it up, the Khawarij, despite the fact that they had gone astray, were simple and primitive, but, because he was sufficiently sly, Mu'awiyah knew what to do and was determined to achieve his objectives at all cost.

It seems that the Kufans were unable to cope with Imam's constructive ambitions and had become tired. He grew weary of them as well, and was so annoyed that he pronounced a malediction, for not only had they left him helpless, but they had neglected to protect their wives and daughters, leaving them wide open to the brutality of treacherous mercenaries from Damascus. As an instance, we now narrate a malediction of Imam Ali:

'I saw Ali (a) speaking to people,' Abu Salih Hanafi said, 'with the Holy Qur'an on his head, the papers of which were rustling. Ali was uttering, "O Allah! From whatever is written in Your book, they have prevented me. Upon me bestow any part of this book. O Allah! In disfavour I hold them as they also hold me in disfavour, and of them hast Thou become tired, as they hastily become so to me. They have forced me to act against my nature and to act in ways as yet unknown to me. O Allah! Grant me helpers better than they, but grant them leaders worse than me. O Allah! Dissolve their hearts like salt in water.'[113]

Imam Ali (as) stated that, despite being a ruler, he had been oppressed by the people. The people's present state made the Imam declare that he was by no means able to reform them. Though he could rule them by force, it was never the way he chose.

He himself described them well enough:

'O people of Kufah! With Qur'anic advice thee I reproached, fruitless it was. With rods thee I threatened, useless it was. With whips thee I punished, pointless it was. The only means to reform thee is the sword, but at a cost of thy reforming never do I excite discord.' The sword was the one and the only thing that could make the people of Iraq obedient. This fact has been confirmed throughout history.[114]

However, Mu'awiyah revelled in the division within Imam Ali's (as) party, and used the opportunity to attack more of the territories under Imam Ali's (as) control. It was during those days that Busr carried out his attacks against the Hijaz and Yemen, and when he arrived in Yemen, 'Ubayd Allah had already left. Although a number of Shi'ite Muslims defied him for a while, many were martyred. He committed countless crimes. He beheaded a hundred Shi'ite Muslims. Then he moved towards the Hadramawt where numerous Shi'ite Muslims allegedly resided. He had said he would kill one out of every four. Upon being informed of this, the Imam sent Djaria Ibn Qudama with an army to follow him. When Djaria heard that Busr had gone to Mecca, he followed him there, but Busr had already left. When he returned to Kufah, Djaria faced a bitter reality; the assassination of Imam Ali (as).

3. The Assassination of Imam Ali (as)

From the above information we understand that Ali (as) had difficult days during his caliphate, facing domestic struggles and mutinous uprisings. His duty was beyond question more complicated than those peaceful days when he remained in isolation. Although Imam Ali (as) did not participate in the early governments, he was in passive opposition to the Saqifah's government. Despite the fact that opposing the government was difficult for him, in the early years he attempted to resort to seclusion, so the government would not have to fear him. Sa'ad Ibn 'Ubada was a good example for him and others. He failed to pay allegiance and in the time of the first or second caliph, he was said to have been immediately assassinated by Jinns. Obviously, his murder had been politically motivated, slyly

planned, and secretly performed, as has been mentioned in some historical sources.

According to Ibn Abi al-Hadid, Abu Ja'far Naqib, Yahya Ibn Zayd was asked, 'I am amazed how Ali has survived this long after the Messenger's demise, from the vengeance of all the Quraysh.'

Abu Ja'far answered, 'Had he not belittled and isolated himself, he might have been killed.'

He turned himself away from his memories and devoted himself to worship, reading the Qur'an, and prayer, leaving his initial state of mind and his sword, as if he were a sinner who had repented, probing the earth and living on the mountains like a monk. He survived because he obeyed the rulers of the time; otherwise, he would have been killed.

He then refers to Khalid's action to kill Imam Ali (as). Mu'min al-Taq also believes that Ali (as) made no political effort at this time, because otherwise he could have been murdered by 'invisible energies' i.e., the jinn, as in the case of Sa'ad.[115]

However, once he was elected, he spared no effort to achieve his justified goals. As he not only had to fight many times but also had to put up with a long period of struggle and internal fighting, it would be fairly natural to claim that many held hatred in their hearts towards Ali (as). When the Khawarij were defeated, only a few of them remained alive, surviving Imam Ali's (as) sword. One of them was a family who had a daughter, Qutam. She was an attractive woman, and when a man amongst her group named Abd ur-Rahman bin Muljam al-Murad proposed marriage to her, she agreed on one condition. She accepted his proposal provided that her dowry would be Imam Ali's (as) head. She asked her

potential bridegroom to assassinate him in revenge for the spilt blood of the many members of her family.

Days passed and Abd ur-Rahman met a few other Muslims who shared his opinion that Ali (as) was a danger to the Muslims. Along with these fellows, he planned the assassinations of three men, Ali, Mu'awiyah, and 'Amr bin al 'As. Two of the men failed to assassinate their intended victims, but Ibn Muljam succeeded in his crime, and Imam Ali (as) was assassinated while performing his morning prayer in the Kufah mosque. And this event marked yet another downwards slide in the worldly position of the elevated *Ahlul Bayt* (as).

However, despite those bitter years and battles, I believe Imam Ali (as) succeeded in manifesting a pure and perfect way of remaining faithful to principles while fighting evil and maintaining strength when facing distortion. A contemporary Western historian writes:

Ali's rule, to be sure, had not gained popularity in Kufah during his lifetime. The loyalist following that he built up during the final years of his reign, consisting of men convinced that he was the best of Muslims after the Prophet and the only one entitled to rule them, remained a small minority. The town was deeply divided in its attitude towards him. What united the majority now was rather their distrust of, and opposition to, Mu'awiyah and his Syrian cohorts.
Umayyad highhandedness, misrule, and repression were gradually to turn the minority of Ali's admirers into a majority. In the memory of later generations Ali became the ideal Commander of the Faithful. In face of the fake Umayyad claim to legitimate sovereignty in Islam as God's Vicegerents on earth, and in view of Umayyad treachery, arbitrary and divisive government, and vindictive retribution, they came to appreciate his honesty, his unbending devotion to the reign of

Islam, his deep personal loyalties, his equal treatment of all his supporters, and his generosity in forgiving his defeated enemies. They were now prepared to forget the harsh edges of his rule and his at times grave errors of judgment, which had divided his followers, and rather blamed their ancestors for failing to support him unconditionally, the more radical among them extolled him, surrounding him with an aura of impeccability and supernatural qualities. Such views were far from his own mind. For although he, with some justification, had claimed to know the Prophet's message and practice better, and to be more sincerely devoted to Islam then anyone after Muhammad, he was well aware of, and admitted, some of his human failings and was concerned with making amends for them. It was, in the end, largely the same qualities that brought about both the failure of his reign and his elevation to a much-revered saintly hero in Islam.[116]

In my understanding, the assassination of Ali (as) marks a big shift in hostility against *Ahlul Bayt*. Admittedly, several Caliphs had been assassinated before him, such as the second and the third. So presumably, this incident was not received with too much shock for the majority of Muslims. However, for us, he was the first Caliph of the *Ahlul Bayt* to be assassinated by the Muslims. This gesture probably has double implications. For the *Ahlul Bayt*, it served as a warning for them to prepare to face at least a similar, if not a worse, destiny as he had faced; and, regarding the condition of the Muslim *Ummah*, it reflects the most extreme deterioration of their morality to the depth of the vilest imaginable depraved mentality. They had submerged into the slime of the most loathsome and ignorant level of enmity towards the *Ahlul Bayt*. And if this enmity was, in those days, limited to the small group of Muslims known as the Khawarij, I would not hesitate to expect these people would be easily manipulated to commit further criminal acts against the *Ahlul Bayt* themselves.

2. Imam Hasan's (as) Treaty

When Imam Ali (as) was assassinated, he had already nominated his son, Imam Hasan (as), for leadership of the Muslims. Although many of the Muslim community gave their allegiance to Imam Hasan (as), Mua'wiyah carried on hatching his plans to fight the authority, this time, of Imam Hasan (as). However Mu'awiyah's combat took the form of a cold war on this occasion, and he never ceased sending forth his propaganda against the Imam, followed by his curses and abuse.[117] Meanwhile, Imam Hasan (as) faced a more complicated situation after his father's departure. Kufah has been through turmoil, and no one doubted the complicated circumstances after Imam Ali's (as) departure. From historical records we understand that Imam Hasan (as) first called for war, but as soon as he witnessed that his people were going to forsake him, he capitulated.

The Kufians took different positions on different occasions. First, they rose to defend the *Ahlul Bayt* and strengthened Shi'ism with their courage. It was with their assistance that the Imam defeated Talha and Zubayr's army. Yet it was in the last years of Imam Ali's caliphate that they hesitated; it was after the arbitration *(Tahkeem)*, that they let him down. However, if one is interested in analysing the different classes in Kufah, we can sum it up in the following way:

- The first group was the Khawarijis.
- Another was in some way the accomplices of the Umayyads.
- The other noble group consisted of the Shi'ite Muslim *Ahlul Bayt* devotees, among whom were the righteous, praised for their rightful deeds.

- And there were the wicked, who kept on with their wickedness until they murdered the Prophet's (saws) grandson.

There was also the tribal card. Another factor that affected the society was the power structure of the tribes that were influential in people's quick stance changing. The people were so extreme and irrational in tribal prejudice that they made rash decisions on any trivial affair. Many decisions in favour of the tribes threatened the Kufians' unity, and whatever destroyed the society's unity is precisely what the Umayyads took advantage of in the past. Thus the Iraqis' position regarding Imam Hasan Ibn Ali (as) is plainly obvious and the events ensuing from his election to the caliphate are easy to understand. Shaykh Mufid classified the society during that period into categories: Imam Ali's Shi'ite Muslims; the Kharidjites who were intent on fighting Mu'awiyah and who allied with Imam Hasan when he expressed his intention of battling against Damascus; those greedy for booty; common people negligent of what to do; and the group that included those with tribal prejudices, who obeyed their chiefs, regardless of religion. The number of those belonging to Mu'awiyyah allies exceeded all others. As Iraq was the centre of eastern conquests, they had gained a great deal of booty in all the wars. Yet since Imam Ali's entrance into the land civil wars had begun; they, therefore, assumed the 'Alawites to be debtors. After Nahrawan, they no longer considered it good thinking to start a new war under the prevailing circumstances. With the rumours spread by Mu'awiyah's spies in Iraq, however, doubt grew among the Iraqis. The emergence of the Kharidjites added to their doubt, undermining their understanding of the situation.[118]

Many also tried to create a division within the Shi'ah by asking the brother of Imam Hasan (as), Imam Husayn, to

undertake a different action based on a different decision. It is also narrated in Mada'ni that Imam Husayn (as) balked at compromising until his brother convinced him. There are many proofs against such claims, indicating the one that Imam Husayn (as) had known no other way more appropriate than compromising and had called upon people to obey his brother.

First, Imam Husayn's practical way of conduct was indifference to the remarks and actions trying to set him against his brother and introduce him as the Shiite Muslims' leader in Iraq. To the very last moment of his brother's life, Imam Husayn was beside him, living like him, in Madinah. Even for eleven years after his brother's martyrdom, Imam Husayn's position was identical to that of his brother. This demonstrates without a doubt that he agreed to compromise.

Second, extremist Shiite Muslims, resentful of compromising, approached Imam Husayn, urging him to become their leader. Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Bashir Hamdani recounted:

Sufyan Ibn Abi Layla and I went to Madinah to meet Hasan Ibn Ali (a). When we stepped in, Musayyib Ibn Nadjba, along with a number of other people, was there. I greeted him.

صدق ابو محمد, فليكن كل رجل منكم حلساً من أحلاس بيته مادام هذا الانسان حياً فان يهلك وانتم احياء رجونا أن يخيّر الله لنا ويؤتنا رشدنا ولا يكلنا الى انفسنا

My brother is true. All of you should stay at home as long as Mu'awiyah is alive. If he were dead and you alive, may Allah do what our progress is in and may He leave us not on our own.

When it was demanded of him to rise up, Imam Husayn said:

أما أنا, فليس رأيي اليوم ذلك, فالصقوا رحمكم الله بالارض واكنموا البيوت واحترسوا الظنة مادام معاوية حياً

I do not believe so. Mercy on you, as long as Mu'awiyah is alive stay at home and avoid being suspected. [119]

In conclusion, Imam Hasan (as) was forced to sign the peace treaty because of a lack of popular support. Treachery was yet another blow against the authority of the *Ahlul Bayt*. It was clear for him, by that time, that the mentality of the Muslim *Ummah* had become so warped that it could not even rally behind the leader of the Prophet's (saws) household, whom they had been ordered to adhere to. Many years had passed and many of the prophetic teachings were almost forgotten. The mentality of the Muslims had descended to the level that they were even willing to forsake him, and worse, to assassinate him, as happened with Imam Ali (as).

He had tried to speak to his people and create a referendum environment by his speech. He called them for a public assembly, and then he addressed the gathered people. He praised Allah, lauded Him, and said:

'By Allah, neither doubt nor regret prevents us from the Syrians. Rather we fought against them with safety and patience. However, safety was mixed with enmity and patience with impatience. Your religion was before your life in this world, during your advancing against (them at the Battle of) Siffin. However, today your life in this world has come before your religion. Indeed you have come between two killed (persons) – one was killed at (the Battle) of Siffin and you weep over him, and the

other was killed at (the Battle of) al-Nahrawan and you avenge his blood. As for the rest, they are betrayers, and as for the weeper, he is a rebel. Indeed, Mu'awiyah has summoned us to a matter in which there is neither dignity nor justice. So, if you want death, we will answer in kind and judge him for Allah with our swords. If you want life, we will accept him and take contentment for you.' So the people called al-Hasan from all directions, 'The rest! The rest! Make peace!'[120]

Anyone who can read between the lines will detect the fact mentioned above that social conditions were at their worst, and he did not expect to achieve anything if he ignored the peace treaty suggested by Mu'awiyah. Therefore, he wrote to Mu'awiyah anticipating that peace would be a better solution, even if it were because of his evil deeds. These are some of al-Hasan's words to Mu'awiyah:

Leave aggression and prevent the blood of the Muslim from shedding. By Allah you have shed a lot of their blood. Fear Allah, for you will meet Him.[121]

One of his companions blamed him for making peace with Mu'awiyah, so he said:

By Allah, if I had supporters, I would fight against Mu'awiyah day and night.[122]

At any rate, after signing the peace treaty, and owing to the cunning and unmanly plots of Mu'awiyah on the one hand, and the perfidy of the Kufah people and their lack of devotion to the way of right on the other, the truce was concluded, Mu'awiyah entered the city of Kufah, the capital of the Alawi caliphate, as a powerful Umayyad statesman, and delivered a public oration in which he said:

I swear to God that I did not fight you because you pray and observe fast nor because you go on pilgrimage and pay tithes. These tasks are your own duties. My only purpose was to rule and govern you! God has granted me my wish, whereas you are not pleased with it.[123]

Mu'awiyah's Policy after Gaining Power

In reaction to what Imam Ali (as) had institutionalized by cursing Mu'awiyah and his minions, when Mu'awiyah took power he launched a similar institution against his opposing party. It should not surprise us to see how Mu'awiyah employed every possible device in order to carry out his wicked purpose of blemishing the household of the Prophet of Allah (saws), the Qur'an, and the guardians of Islam (especially the most outstanding of them, namely Imam Ali) all of whom had conquered people's hearts with their peerless chastity and virtue. Mu'awiyah did his utmost to misrepresent their fine qualities and brilliance. He instigated the propagation of misinterpreted ideas and topics that took control of the minds of simple-minded people in such a way as to make it impossible for them to return to the clear spring of Islam and the Qur'an; and to make them unable to find the true path of the Qur'an and Islam by reference to the Prophet's descendants. He was then able to succeed in infusing these adulterating ideas as a constant element in people's minds.[124] The first step was to curse Imam Ali (as) from every pulpit from the east to the west of the Islamic lands. This sly political plan was, in modern terms, a spin-doctor type of propaganda brainwashing.[125] His reason for choosing Imam Ali was first and foremost that he had been the first person, though not the last, to curse him. After some time during the course of

his leadership, an issue was given by Mu'awiyah to his agents, stating:

As the narrations about 'Uthman's excellence have become plentiful and are heard in every city, on the receipt of my letter invite the people to recite the virtues of the Prophet's companions and early caliphs, without any mention of Abu Turab's (Ali) qualities except something to his detriment. This will be preferable for me and will please me more, since this is a better means of refuting the arguments of Abu Turab (Ali) and his Shi'ites, and more smashing and harder to digest for them than the traditions cited about the excellence of 'Uthman.[126]

The decree of Mu'awiyah was proclaimed to the people, and immediately false narrations about the virtues of the companions became proliferated without so much as a trace of truth. Simple people heartily accepted these traditions, and they spread so quickly that they were quoted from every pulpit, and were distributed amongst teachers to instruct children accordingly. Young people became so accustomed to them that they memorized these false traditions in parallel with the Qur'an. Then they penetrated the circles of fully grown adult men, and reached the instruction sessions of women, where teachers were engaged in teaching them to women and girls. These traditions were also propagated among servants and slaves.[127] Regarding the Prophet (saws) and his household, one of the opponents of Bani Hashim once declared:

But you see that this Hashimi man's (The Prophet) name is spoken loudly and respectfully five times a day in the whole of the Islamic realm (referring to the Muslim prayer and the call for it). What deed, do you think, will leave a memory and what good name can last long? By God! I shall never rest until I bury that name![128]

How to bury this name was no easy task, but the most convenient method was to destroy the institutions that were meant to revive his name or his teaching. And the first thing was to assassinate those who kept his teaching alive. Once Mu'awiyah took over power, he gave an order to his governors:

Kill anyone who does not hold your opinion or belief. Destroy all the inhabited places and plunder their property. Forcefully seize the property of everyone who is rich and does not obey us. Do not abstain from molesting people. Kill Ali's supporters, and don't even spare any woman or child.[129]

In conclusion, Mu'awiyah put to death many of the Imam's friends and supporters, like Hujr and his followers, both because of the rancour he felt towards them, and because he wanted to reinforce the basis of his rule, since they were likely to rebel at any time against the paganism which was being revived, thus creating a serious danger for his government. [130]

Aside from wiping out the pious companions of the Prophet (saws), Mu'awiyah tried his utmost to arrange for the caliphate to be transferred to his own progeny. Ibn Abd Rabbih, the well-known Andalusian writer says:

Mu'awiyah spent seven successive years trying to pave the way for the people's allegiance to Yazid. He consulted crafty politicians, and deceived those around him with money, and brought near him those who were more remote by means of all kinds of tricks.[131]

However, in order to achieve such an ambitious but very devious goal, he had to contemplate removing all the obstacles from realizing his plans. The main obstacle was the treaty with Imam Hasan (as) on which he had agreed, as

one of the acts of the treaty was that he would be the Caliph after Mu'awiyah's death. Therefore, he needed to get Imam Hasan (as) permanently out of his way.

1. The Poisoning of Imam Hasan (as)

There are many historical records that guide us to the categorical conclusion that Mu'awiyah was always interested in changing the Muslims' leadership to his son and grandsons. This meant that he had to sweep all potential candidates from the political scene in order to leave his son free of any serious threat or bona fide rivals. Mu'awiyah was, of course, clever enough to realize that he would need to achieve his desire with a spotless reputation. A famous method during the ancient days was assassination via by poison. It was well practiced amongst the Romans, and Mu'awiyah was the closest to the governors to the Roman Empire, and he practiced it assiduously. The first to be eliminated was Malik Ibn Ashtar, who was assassinated by some poisoned honey on his way to Egypt. When the time was perfect for Mu'awiyah, he wanted to assassinate Imam Hasan (as) with a similar method. Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, the famous historian writes:

Mu'awiyah desired people's allegiance for his son Yazid. But in this course no obstacles were greater than al-Hasan ibn Ali and Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas. In order to remove these two great obstacles, he secretly poisoned them both and they died.[132]

We do not intend to go into details of how this evil crime took place, but we do find this case alone represents a perfect example of the deprivation of what was rightfully the *Ahlul Bayt*'s (as), and a perfect example of how their enemies oppressed them and aimed at bringing them down.

Even before his death, Imam Hasan (as) expressed his wish to be buried beside his grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad (saws), although, realizing the conditions, he added that if there were people against this decision they could ignore his request, as he wanted his wish to be fulfilled without bloodshed. It is narrated that Um ul-Mumineen 'Aiy'shah rode an animal, and rejected Imam Hasan's (as) request to be buried beside the Prophet (saws). She realized intuitively that it could add to the honour and prestige of the *Ahlul Bayt* (as), and if he, as the first grandson, could be buried there, it would set a precedent for all the grandsons of the Prophet (saws) to be buried there. This marked her hatred to Ali (as) once again.

Shaykh Mufid in his closing of his book *al-Jamal* details another chapter on the reason why 'Aiy'shah begrudged the Imam. Later, he writes that when Imam Hasan (as) was to be buried near the Prophet (saws), she opposed it and said: 'Why do you want to bury someone whom I dislike in my house?'[133]

Day *Zero:* The countdown for Imam Husayn's (as) tragic death started much earlier than Ashurah

The above-mentioned examples are only a few clear instances in which the *Ahlul Bayt* suffered at the hands of biased Muslims. Although these examples are different in their timing, nature, and actors involved, there are two principal factors common to all:

1. These were all occasions in which the authority and dignity of the *Ahlul Bayt* were attacked and undermined, and may manifest a deliberately extreme violation of their rights.

2. It is unfortunate but undeniable that after the Prophet's (saws) demise the antagonists of the *Ahlul Bayt* (as) were either highly respected companions of the Prophet (saws) or people who commanded authority in the Muslim community.

To conclude, it can be said that these incidents, which took place over decades, had the effect of causing a progressively negative shift in the mentality of the Muslim *Ummah* regarding the position of the *Ahlul Bayt*. It was this shift that allowed the *Ahlul Bayt* to be hunted down on day *Zero*, to be mercilessly killed and for their women to be imprisoned only fifty years after the Prophet's (saws) departure.

Conclusion

A central point that can easily be concluded from the twelve parts of this chapter is that, after the Prophet's (saws) demise, the Islamic *Ummah* fell victim to a huge distortion of pure Islam, and was subject to a massive deviation, which commenced with the Saqifah, depriving the *Ahlul Bayt* and Imam Ali (as) from his legitimate right of leadership, and which continued in the constant denial of what was rightfully theirs, until it marked itself in the tragic end at Karbalah – a merciless slaughter of the Prophet's (saws) grandson, and the un-Islamic kidnapping of his women and children.

However, we consider that whatever they suffered was for the sake of Allah (swt), and is recorded as such by the angels of the Almighty, and they will certainly be rewarded and recompensed on the Day of Judgement. These incidents reinforce our firm belief that the struggle between good and evil will remain forever, and as long as humanity exists in

the material world, this struggle towards perfection and against evil will last with him. The aim and culmination must also be clear, and there must exist in human society an exceptional individual who, thanks to his spiritual qualities, has penetrated to the inner meaning of all laws; a personage who, while being fully engaged in the struggle has never once fallen prey to deviation. [134]

Chapter 2

Imam Husayn's (as) spiritual position

The memory of Al-Husayn (as) and his revolution has been thoroughly analysed and reported from the political, historical, and emotional point of view. Yet perhaps the most important facet has continually been overlooked or unintentionally ignored. The mystical position of Imam Husayn (as) is the foundation stone for understanding the events that occurred and without studying his mystical personality, we cannot fully appreciate and benefit from the lessons of Ashurah.

Imam Husayn (as) encompasses both theoretical and practical mysticism through his knowledge while demonstrating practical mysticism in his exemplary life and behaviour.

However, in order to understand how Al-Husayn (as) is the heir of such mystical knowledge and practice we first need to provide the reader with an introduction to mysticism. We find it necessary to elaborate on the different forms of mysticism and explain how it is a universal phenomenon, aiming to create a brief idea about the whole concept and its implications.

An Introduction to Mysticism (*'Irfan*)

Ho! O Saki, pass around and offer the bowl (of love for God):
For love at first appeared easy, but difficulties have occurred.

By reason of the perfume of the musk-pod, that at the end, the breeze displayeth from that forelock,
From the twist of its musky curl, what blood befell the hearts.

In the stage of the beloved – mine what ease and pleasure, when momently,
The bell giveth voice, saying: 'Bind ye up the chattels of existence!'

With wine, becolour the prayer-mat – if the Pir of the magians bid thee;
For of the way and usage of the stages not without knowledge is the holy traveller.

The dark night, and the fear of the wave and the whirlpool so fearful
The light-burdened ones of the shore – how know they our state?

By following my own fancy, me to ill fame all my work brought:
Secret – how remaineth that great mystery whereof assemblies speak?

Hafiz! if thou desire the presence – from Him be not absent:
When Thou visitest Thy Beloved, abandon the world; and let it go.

This is not a poem describing an ordinary love or erotic experience, but a poem from the famous Iranian poet Hafiz, which shall lead us into the centre of the universal mystical experience.

Mystical experience is a phenomenon common to all religions and races, differing in its manifestations but

sharing a parallel foundation. Contemporary authors commonly associate mysticism with a form of consciousness involving an encounter, or union, with an ultimate order of reality, however this reality is to be understood. This is a pan-religious idea; indeed, we can find ideas from other world religions that will shed light on Islamic mysticism. Mysticism can be found in virtually all cultures and religious traditions, and is perhaps as old as humanity itself. Mystical phenomena may be observed in Zoroastrianism, the European alchemists, the Hellenistic world, within feminine spiritualities, and in the experience of the Good shared by well-known mystics such as St Theresa and St Francis. We will even find mysticism in the modern approaches of psychologists like Carl G. Jung. Mystical concepts have fallen into pop culture usage; witness the frequent appearance of the phrase "vision" in popular slang, as a reference to some sort of sudden or unexpected insight.

Despite the different meaning depending on the context and the user, it is a phrase widely used in the cinematic milieu. William Goldman[135] says in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*: "Boy, I had a vision."[136]

Amongst Christian Church leaders it is also used to refer to a different theosophic meaning. The Russian Orthodox Church leader Andre Borisovich Bloom has explained the sinats' experience referring to a similar concept. He said:

"It is not the constant thought of their sins but the vision of the holiness of God that make the saints aware of their own sinfulness".[137]

Tennyson wrote:

Men, my brother, men the workers, ever reaping something new:
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they shall do:

For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heaven fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue... [138]

He is speaking about having a vision, at once focusing on life and at the same time reaching far beyond normal human capacities, to the point where a person feels himself capable of seeing into the future.

One is fully aware that these different uses of the word are quite far from the mystical sense of this part of this book, however our aim is to demonstrate that despite the differences amongst different people's understandings of a concept, how very much they are alike when it comes to their profound and spiritual notion of life.

This experience is shared by different kinds of human beings. Nonetheless, there is no agreement on the identifying characteristics of mystical states; the term 'mysticism' and its cognates have undergone long evolution and have been used in a bewildering variety of ways. The word 'mystic', meaning 'occult' or 'secret', was written in the past (before 1382) as *mistyke*. It was used in the Wycliffe Bible, where the meaning was always spiritually symbolic. Etymologically, it was borrowed from the Old French *mystique*, and ultimately from the Latin *mysticus*. The meaning in relation to occult practices was first recorded in 1615.[139]

Mysticism continues to elude easy definition, and its nature and significance remain the subject of intense debate. The terms 'mystic', 'mystical', and 'mysticism' have been used in an astonishing variety of ways by different authors in different eras. Nevertheless, modern philosophical

discussions have tended to focus on 'mystical experiences', understood as certain states or modes of awareness, allegedly found within (and even outside) virtually all faith traditions, and variously characterized as 'consciousness without content', 'the Experience of Absolute Oneness', 'union with the Transcendent', 'immediate consciousness of the Presence of God', and so on. Philosophers are particularly interested in whether such experiences constitute a 'way of knowing', and whether they provide any support for either traditional religious beliefs or unusual metaphysical claims made by certain mystics (for example, the claim that time is illusory). Some authors argue affirmatively, on the basis of an alleged 'universal consensus among mystics', or the parallels between mystical consciousness and other modes of experience accepted as cognitive. Others, however, challenge these views, noting that mystics often appear to disagree precisely along the lines of their prior religious convictions, claiming that mystical awareness is explicable in terms of natural causes, that mystical claims (like claims about one's private feelings) do not admit to ordinary testing, or that the alleged 'ineffability' of mystical states frustrates any attempt at rational analysis.

These different manifestations or even strange claims tend to shape the kinds of questions typically addressed in contemporary philosophical discussions of mysticism, such as: What is mysticism? What are the identifying characteristics of mystical experience? Is mysticism 'everywhere the same',

And, if so, in what sense? Are there different types of mystical experiences? What is the relationship between mystical awareness and its interpretation? Are mystical experiences a 'way of knowing'? Do they involve some form of union or contact with God? Are mystical experiences ineffable or 'non-logical', and, if they are not, then what

shape do they take? And, if they are ineffable, in what sense is it that they cannot be understood? Can drugs or other natural stimuli induce mystical experience, and would that affect their cognitive value? These questions are not all relevant to our discussion, but they are raised by many scholars.

Such ongoing disputes about the nature and significance of mysticism only underscore the challenges and the importance of studying its history. On the one hand, without consensus on a definition, scholars disagree on which texts and figures merit inclusion in a historical survey of mysticism. On the other hand, arguments about whether mystical experiences are 'everywhere the same' can hardly be settled without an appeal to historical evidence.

Islamic mysticism (theoretical *'Irfan*) is a phenomenon not found in Christianity, Judaism, or other religions. *'Irfan* is an Arabic word, whose literal meaning is 'knowing'. In technical terms used within mysticism, it describes a special perception of the interior of the soul, though it is a perception not borne of sensory experience or rational analysis. In the process of spiritual wayfaring (*as-sayr wa suluk*), disclosures are obtained which are similar to visions. Sometimes there is the exact presentation of something, which occurred in the past, present, or future, and sometimes an effect is produced that is reminiscent of demonic possession. The topics, which the gnostics discuss through their own interpretation, disclosures and findings of conscience, are called scientific or theoretical mysticism (*Al-'Irfan Al-Ilmi*). Sometimes, by adding reasoning and inferences, these discussions take the form of philosophical discourses. Ayatollah Khumayni was an exemplar of theoretical *'Irfan.* Ayatollah Khumayni taught *'Irfan* in Qum, prior to his expulsion in 1963. At the same time, he was teaching ethics, and said: 'This universe is witnessing the

presence of God.' He then advised us: 'Don't commit any sins in the Presence of God or whilst having the vision of God.'

'Irfan can be divided into two forms:

- *Al-'Irfan an-Nadheri* or theoretical mysticism, which is a sophisticated science replete with its own technical terms. Some of these terms can be more arcane than those used in philosophy. For this reason, many Muslim scholars argue that to know God, the Qur'an, and the traditions are enough, and that no more is required from the layperson.

- The second type of *'Irfan* is *Al-'Irfan Al-'amali*, or practical mysticism. Many believe that practical mysticism is a code of practices founded upon the belief that knowledge of God and ultimate truth may be reached by re-directing one's mind and spiritual insight independently of reason and the senses.[140] We would emphasize, however, that this is *not* what we mean by practical *'Irfan*. Rather, we hold that practical *'Irfan* is a wise adherence to the straight path of the Divine Law, where one acts upon the highest ethical values of religion.

Al-'Irfan An-Nadheri or Mystical Philosophy

Mystical philosophy in Islam has an intimate connection with mainstream Islamic philosophy. It consists of several main strands, ranging from Ismaili thought to the metaphysics of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Al-'Arabi, with a continuing powerful presence in the contemporary Islamic world. It may be difficult for the layperson to grapple with these original texts, which are replete with their own jargon; but we will attempt to explain some of their meaning here.

Al-'Irfan an-Nadheri deals with two main questions: The existence of the One, and the Oneness of existence. In the Western milieu, a similar theory of oneness is often labelled 'pantheism', which is defined as the doctrine that the world as a whole and nature in the widest meaning, of the word, is divine.[141] Many great religious mystics have been pantheists in this sense.[142] One may reflect and remember God while observing nature. Nonetheless, many Western philosophers considered themselves as pantheists, yet they denied any existence of God.

However when Muslim *Irfani* scholars refer to this oneness, they implement it in another philosophical meaning. It is certainly the philosophy behind S. M. Baqir As-Sadr's approach in his book, *The Logical Basis of Induction*, when he employs the inductive proof (*Ad-daleel al-'istiqra'i*) in arguing for the existence of God. As he says while concluding the message of his entire philosophical research:

An inductive proof (which is based on the observation of and data from nature) of the existence of God would be on the same footing as any scientific inference. We have found that science and religion are connected and consistent, having the same logical basis, and cannot be divorced. Such logical connection between the methods of science and the methods of proving God's existence may be regarded as the ground of understanding the divine direction in the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Muslims, to observe the working of the natural world.[143]

However, mystical scholars attempt to explain the process of Creation in stages. Al-Qayssari in his long foreword to his interpretation of *Al-Fusus* of Ibn Al-'Arabi states that the truth (*Haqq*) has two appearances (*Tajalli*), depending upon which side one is observing. God has appeared through *Fayde Moqdass* (or F. M.), which is linked to the Manifest (*Dhaheriah* and *Akheriah*), and through (*Fayde Aqdas* or F. A.),

which is linked to the Inward (*Al-Batiniah* and the *Awaliah*).[144] He discusses the F. A., which can be rendered in French as *effusion sanctissime*, while in English it could be translated as 'the most holy emanation', while its counterpart F. M. can be translated as 'the holy emanation".[145] One might say that, in Christian belief, this term must be linked to the *Trinity* and the story as to how Jesus was begotten to saint Mary (as). One may draw the similarity to the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father to the Son.[146] But what Muslim *'Irfani* scholars mean to describe is absolutely irrelevant to the Christian Trinity' rather by these concepts they mean the first existence created by God.

This first existence is considered to be the first marvel from the Almighty Allah. Philosophers may use a term like 'First Originated Existence' (*As-Saader Al-A'awal*) to describe the same thing. All these terms are meant to describe the process of coming from a source, and how the world later came into being.

The technical term employed to describe this process is *Ta'ayoun*, or 'phenomenalization'.[147] Mystical scholars distinguish between the first and the second, *Ta'ayoun Awal* and *Ta'ayoun Thani*, where the first is the stage of Unity (*Wahdah*), and the second is the stage of Uniqueness (*Wahdaniah*).[148] Shi'ite mystical scholars believe, as Jammi has said, that the first *Ta'ayoun* is a phenomenalization of unity, which is simple and possesses all the potential to reflect the One.[149] They believe, as *At-Turkah* stated, that things first existed as knowledgeable existence (*Al-Wujoud Al-Ilmi*), and through the F. A. they later emerged in the concrete world (*Al-Wujoud Al-A'yni*) through the agency of the F. M.

These ideas are based on the Qur'anic distinction between the visible world (*'Alam As-Shahadah*) and the invisible world

(*'Alam Al-Ghayb*).[150] That is why mystical scholars distinguish between the first phenomenalization and the second. They state that before creation things were distinguishable through knowledge, owing to their nature, but after their concrete appearance things would become distinguishable through their concrete occurrence. F. M. has been named 'The All-Merciful Breath' (*An-Nafas Ar-Rahmani*) or 'the all-inclusive existence' (*Al-Faydh Al-Munbassit*). This 'Godly Breath' is, however, only a metaphor, as there is only One which was reflected into one.[151] Suhrawardi states that it is like the breathed air of a human being which is unique, but soon, after going through vocal cords, it makes different *phones*. Those various *phones* would be studied in phonetics, although the air of a human being's breath is the same.

Finally, in light of the increasingly technical nature of much philosophical debate in which primary mystical sources, themselves, often play a fairly major role, one may consider that even if mystical thinkers were aware of advocating an approach to thinking and knowledge different to much of the Peripatetic tradition, they have, nonetheless, constructed a systematic approach, often continuous with that very same tradition. On the whole, they emphasize the role of intellectual intuition in our approach to understanding reality, seeking to show how such an understanding might be put on a solid conceptual basis. The ideas that they created were designed to throw light on the nature of the inner essence of Islam.

Al-'Irfan Al-Amali or Practical Mysticism

The meaning of practical mysticism follows on from the definitions we have given for theoretical mysticism. The defining characteristic of this teaching is its striving for

perfection. The tradition uses an example of a polygamous husband, who is according to Islamic Shari'ah Law obliged to maintain justice amongst them, and says: 'This world and the next are like the two wives of a husband',[152] which is referring, it is argued, to the Islamic injunction 'to keep just between two wives,' in assiduously giving both their rights. This principle means that men must keep working for both worlds in a balanced way.

The whole message of practical mysticism can be summed up in one sentence: 'We – all human beings – are from Allah, and we will be returned to Him'. To understand practical mysticism one can also examine the Qur'an, where we are told about the One whom we should worship, Allah the Exalted. We are told that He has created human beings, and that though He does not need our worship, He enjoins it upon us for the sake of our own perfection, a perfection brought about by knowing Him. The final goal of worship should be awareness of this message. Therefore, the Qur'an advises the believers to constantly repeat these teachings to themselves, in order to become conscious of their full meaning. This is especially true when we face life's quandaries. Allah the Exalted describes the believers as those

Who bear in mind the certainty that they are to meet their Lord, and that they are to return to Him.[153]

Who say, when afflicted with calamity: 'To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return.'[154]

...Who dispense their charity with their hearts full of fear, because they will return to their Lord.[155]

The Prophet (saws) once said, 'The love of one's country is a part of faith.' Suhrawardi has interpreted this as not referring to a certain territory or a specific land where one was born, but rather to the holy home where the human soul dwelt before coming to life in this world. Again we notice that Mawlanah, in one of his poems, points out this feeling when he says: 'Every one who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it.'[156]

A human being should feel this reality in his or her daily life, which should lead one to know that he or she is just an imperfect individual, and feel how small he or she is in this universe. There is only One, Who possesses all the power, and Who is guiding and controlling everything in the universe. It is this feeling that enabled the saints to be Perfect Men. This idea of the Perfect Man was first propounded by Muhyi Al-Din Ibn 'Arabi in the thirteenth century A.D., and this term, as found in recent European literature, has its roots in Islamic views. In the seventeenth century A.D., Mulla Sadra and his followers held that Muhyi Al-Din's mystical principles, including his view of the Perfect Man, conform only to Shi'ite teachings. To be a Perfect Man one must follow the teaching of Islam, and to act within its ethical values, as revealed to Prophet Muhammad (saws). But according to Muslim *Sufis,* the essence of this practice started from the first day of Adam's creation. Indeed, all the holy Prophets in one way or another represented, in their deeds, the correct mysticism. In an Arabic dictionary authored by a Muslim writer, Sufism is defined as 'the various orders which espouse mystical approaches to the understanding of Allah', a concept which can be translated, in practice, into asceticism and mysticism.[157]

If aspiration is towards perfection, man is considered a traveller in practical mysticism. He is seeking perfection for

himself, and salvation for others all over again. Now we are going to analyse the second part of the aspiration, i.e. salvation for others.

Mulla Sadra included in his *magnum opus*, *Al-Asfar Al-Arba'ah*, four chapters in tribute to the famous 'four journeys' of Islamic mysticism. But this was done because a mystic, as he argued, has four journeys:

1. From man to God.
2. With God within God.
3. From God to man, with God.
4. From man, within people, with God.

The result of the last journey is the most relevant for our discussion, because it is this journey that must be taken by a Prophet, an Imam, a saviour, or a reformer. During all these periods man is a traveller who is seeking salvation, both for himself and for others. The story of such a spiritual traveller is that of a traveller who is not satisfied with his own salvation when he reaches the apex of spirituality, but rather, because of his compassion, strives to save others; and returns toward man while having the extensive knowledge acquired during his journey. He helps man, accompanying him into the world of Light. If we argue that man's journey is from man towards God and that he should stay there, we do not know man; and if we argue, as do the modern world's materialistic schools, that man should move towards man without moving towards God, we become unable to do anything for the salvation of human beings. This is not taken as a service to people; rather, it is treachery to mankind. His deed is not to reform – which is the deed of a prophet – but to corrupt.[158] The prophet brings about the survival of all human beings and informs them about the causes of their

achievements, faults, happiness, and misfortunes. Under such circumstances, he is with God, since his existence is righteous, and the care for humanity never prevents him from remembering God.

It is on these bases that in *'Irfan*, there is a call for just rule over man, or rather, that the latter becomes an inseparable element of the former. This status is titled *Wilayah* (authority) and the person achieved this position is titled *Wali* (a guardian). Of course this *wilayah 'Irfaniah* (spiritual authority) should be distinguished from the political guardianship of *Wilayat il-faqih* (the jurist). However it is my firm belief that each individual is not qualified to be the top on the high rank of a *Wilayat il-faqih* (Islamic authority) unless he has achieved the minimum level of this *wilayah 'Irfaniah* (spiritual authority). The late Imam Khumayni states that the true spiritual traveller, after completing his journey towards God and for God, tries to perfect the servants of God and to develop the lands; then he establishes a government whose main task is to enable all individuals to achieve perfection. In order to be saved, they must obey the leader's orders. Here is where the whole societal dialectic starts: What is the philosophy behind appointing a man and then expecting others to obey him? The answer is as he, Imam Khumayni, put it:

Why has God, the All-Wise, appointed holders of authority and commanded us to obey them? The answer is as follows: He has done so for various causes and reasons. One is that men have been set upon a certain well-defined path and commanded not to stray from it, nor to transgress against the established limits and norms, for if they were to stray, they would fall prey to corruption. Now men would not be able to keep to their ordained path and to enact God's laws unless a trustworthy and protective individual (or power) were appointed over

them with responsibility for this matter, to prevent them from stepping outside the sphere of the licit and transgressing against the rights of others.

Another reason: We do not see a single group, nation, or religious community that has ever been able to exist without an individual entrusted with the maintenance of its laws and institutions – in short, a head or a leader; for such a person is essential for fulfilling the affairs of religion and the world. It is not permissible, therefore, according to divine wisdom, that God should leave men, His creatures, without a leader and guide, for He knows well that they depend on the existence of such a person for their own survival and perpetuation. It is under his leadership that they fight against their enemies, divide the public income among themselves, perform Friday and congregational prayer, and foreshorten the arms of the transgressors who would encroach on the rights of the oppressed.

Another reason: Were God not to appoint an Imam over men to maintain law and order, to serve the people faithfully as a vigilant trustee, religion would fall victim to obsolescence and decay. Its rites and institutions would vanish, the customs and ordinances of Islam would be transformed or even formed. Heretical innovators would add things to religion and atheists and unbelievers would subtract things from it, presenting it to the Muslim in an inaccurate manner. For we see that men are prey to defects; they are not perfect and must strive after perfection.[159]

When the Prophet or Imam is not present, then the righteous jurist is the leader. This is only because of his knowledge and righteousness. In Imam Khumayni's view, sovereignty belongs to the jurist (*Wilayat il-faqih*), not *qua* his jurist status or merely because of his knowledge of Islamic law, but also by reason of his moral qualities, piety, and justice; hence the hadith:

Whoever from among the jurists protects himself from his own ego (nafs), upholds his belief, suppresses his desire, and obeys the will of Allah, only him will ordinary people follow.[160]

In this hadith, the knowledge of jurisprudence is one of the essential elements of the people's obedience. But more important are these four elements: the righteousness of a man's nature, his striving to preserve the religion, his opposition to his own personal desires, and his absolute obedience to the commandments of God concerning the obligatory and the prohibited. If a leader has these four elements in his morality, then his right to train men can by no means be ignored. On the other hand, though a leader may have a high level of knowledge of jurisprudence, if he lacks true morality and righteousness, not only will the right effect pertaining to right training not be created, but adverse effects will emerge.[161]

If the societal and political plan towards perfection of all members of the Islamic society is approved, we turn to the individual and ethical diagram for salvation. Here people must follow the guidance of a leader and/or a saviour who is venerated, for only those who have been able to save themselves first can save other human beings. This begs the question: What is it that one must save oneself from? It is not a matter of saving oneself from nature, nor from other human beings; rather it is a matter of saving man from himself and his seducing soul. As long as man is unable to save himself from his own limitations, he will never be able to rescue himself from nature and other men's bondage.[162]

Though we will not discuss these four terms with their accompanying jargon, we will try to elucidate them in light of the Shi'ite traditions. First, one is always encouraged to gain knowledge, which should secure the human being's salvation. A traveller should start with his own psyche as

the first step in the journey towards perfection. It has been narrated that the most dangerous enemy for a human being is his own ego, or as Mawlanah said: 'The mother of the idols is one self's idol, as those [others] are snakes, and this [the ego] is a dragon-idol.' If the psyche is where the journey starts, the next station is the knowledge of the Lord. It has been narrated that whoever knows his psyche, would know his Lord. It has been recommended to regularly read this prayer:

O Lord, guide me to know Yourself! For if I would not, I will not be able to recognize Your messenger. O Lord, guide me to know Your messenger! For if I would not, I will not be able to know Your appointed leader (Imam). And if I would not, I will stray from the right path.

One shall become conscious that the first step of his or her knowledge was fruitful, and it continues until one comes to recognize the righteous leader, who must guide him or her to the final destination. In conclusion, there are different stages for the traveller's knowledge, which must be systematically approached. By the end of the journey, one realizes that he or she must follow an absolute system of ethics, which is all based on knowledge. Imam Ali (as) used to say:

O seeker of knowledge! There are numerous virtues of knowledge; (should knowledge be incorporated in human shape then) humility would be its head; absence of jealousy would be its eye; understanding would be its ear; truth its tongue; the search for and preservation of truth its memory; purity of motives its heart; recognition and knowledge of (human) affairs and (attributed) things its reasoning; its hand mercy; its legs the visiting of the scholars; its ambition peacefulness; its wisdoms guarding against evil; its achievement salvation; its leader health and vigour; its ride fidelity; its armament

sweet words; its sword acceptance (of the truth); its how sympathy and hospitality; its army discourses with the scholars; its wealth manners and good bearing. Guarding against evil is its treasure; its kit and tiffin good deeds; getting on well (with others) its drink; its guide divine guidance; its mate love of the virtuous."[163]

In this complete system of ethics, every one has his duties, for a specific period of time, owing to certain reasons. The Prophet (saws) used to go to the cave of *Hira* in mount *An-Nur* as a recluse for meditation before he was appointed to prophethood. Lady Khadija (as) used to provide food to him every day, and this was her practical contribution, her practical *'Irfan*. During the time of the Prophet (saws), a group of men used to go to the desert in seclusion for many months. Eventually, their wives came to complain to the Prophet (saws). The Prophet became angry and invited those men to the mosque and said to them "Be like me. I am a human being, eating, praying, and being part of a family, and I am your prophet as well." Muslims are practicing mysticism when they are practicing and living their law-abiding daily lives.

Praying is a whole combination of symbols of practical mysticism. The traveller to Allah has to recognize his state of humility, and to place the humility of servitude and the Glory of the Lordship before his eyes. The stronger this viewpoint, the more spiritual his worship and the stronger the spirit of his worship until, with the help of Allah and the perfect Holy Men (as), he reaches the truth of servitude and its core, and catches a glimpse of the secret of worship. Of all the elements of worship, prayers are the most comprehensive (*jami'iyat*). Among the recommended acts of prayer is the supplication, or *qunut*, and amongst the obligatory acts is the prostration, or *sujud*, which have

particular specialties. It should be noted, however, that absolute servitude is of the highest degrees of perfection and of the loftiest positions of humanity, of which no one has any share except the most perfect of the creatures of Allah, Muhammad (saws), followed by the perfect Guardians (*wali*). All others are limping in servitude, and their worshipping and servitude are endued with causes; only with the steps of servitude can one reach the real absolute (*mi'raj*)[164]. That is why the noble verse says:

Glorified is He who carried His servant by night.[165]

Recitation of the Qur'an is another way of expressing divinity. Man is repeating the same words that were revealed to the Prophet (saws). He becomes, in one way or another, an instrument of reciting God's words. A thorough analysis of the rest of Islamic worship rituals is not feasible in this context, and the philosophy behind other worship forms – that have been revealed to the Prophet (saws) so that he may teach humanity how to be divine – needs to be explained in detail separately.

Imam Husayn (as) is the Inheritor of all Prophets

In the month of Muharram, Shi'ah Muslims recite the famous *Ziyarat Warith* (salutation to the heir) in which Imam Husayn (as) is referred to as 'the heir of the prophets'. At first it may seem strange to consider him the heir to all of God's messengers; after all, he is descended from Ismail, the ancestor of Muhammad (saws) and not Isaac or Jacob (from whom the other prophets came). But when we describe Al-Husayn as an 'heir', we do not mean that he was an inheritor in the conventional, literal sense of the word, instead we intend to illustrate that the legacy which Imam Husayn (as) has received from the prophets is a spiritual one. Therefore, in the course of this chapter we will explore the commonality between his life and personality and that of the prophets of God, and illuminate how the distinctive qualities and attributes of these prophets have come to manifest themselves in the moral and spiritual character of Al-Husayn (as). This is because, when we address him as the inheritor of the prophets, it is essential to understand how he possesses their attributes, and how he embodies the entire line of divine prophethood.

Such a study naturally leads us to many complicated analyses, full of philosophical and religious concepts – with all the possibilities of misconception and misunderstanding that are naturally implied by such a discussion. The situation becomes even more susceptible to confusion when we arrive at the language we shall be using to discuss it. The true meaning and significance of spiritual concepts is, at best, challenging to discern, and so when we employ words such as Salvation, Revival, Vision, Union, Love, Perfection, Organization, Freedom, Unity, Beauty, Knowledge, etc. it is

important that we are aware of a number of important issues.

1. The original Arabic words which Imam Husayn (as) used are derived from the Qur'an, and from a society with a human and historical phase in many ways very dissimilar from the modern Western one. This means that even the most carefully selected equivalent words – along with their translation and brief explanations – will hardly convey the precise nature, or the full range of meaning contained in the words of Imam Husayn (as).

2. We must be equally aware that, however careful we are, we are bound, to a certain extent, if only unconsciously, to invest the variety of words – we choose to translate technical terms of mysticism and Imam Husayn's (as) words – with many indigenous associations and nuances of the Western historical and cultural experience which were unknown, or even very alien to the environment in which he existed. Therefore many words – such as Love, Salvation, Vision, and Union are flooded in English by long usage with many deeply rooted religious, social, psychological, and cultural associations peculiar to Indo-European, Anglo-Saxon, Judæo-Christian, and post-Christian peoples whose world-view and historical experiences have been very dissimilar from the people from whom Imam Husayn (as) sprung and among whom he was taught, learned to speak, and expressed his thoughts. However there is an accommodating factor, which is that Imam Husayn is one of the infallible Imams according to Shi'ah Muslims. They have stated repeatedly that their style was meant to be perceivable and easy to grasp for all peoples, and despite his use of Arabic words, Imam Husayn (as) brilliantly expounded his ideas and experiences in a universal manner.

3. One last problem in the matter of translation is that Imam Husayn (as) drew not only on his own Arabic heritage for words and rhetoric, but was also deeply inspired by the rich intellectual vocabulary of Qur'anic idioms and definite prophetic education, thus rendering the task of fully elucidating some of his more abstract ideas almost impossible. But we have tried our best in the pages that follow and our hope is that we have succeeded in conveying his messages succinctly.

One of the reasons why Al-Husayn (as) is an inheritor of the prophets is because he has received their knowledge. The Imams are known as the gates to Divine wisdom and prophetic erudition. This is shown by Al-Husayn's (as) absolute contentment with the decree of his Lord, which manifests itself in his complete submission and willingness to sacrifice himself for God, for the Divine is the essence of his being, the depth of his knowledge and the profundity of his spiritual perception. All of this is illustrated in his supplication recited on the day of *'Arafat*:

O Allah, how could an argument be given about your Existence by a being whose total and complete existence is in need of you? When did you ever disappear so that You might need an evidence and logic to lead [the people] towards You? And when did You ever become absent and distant so that Your signs and effects compelled the people to get in touch with You? Blind is the eye, which does not see You [when at the same time] You are observing him. What did the one who missed You find? And what does the one who finds You lack? Certainly, the one who became pleased and inclined towards other than You, came to nothingness [failed].

His awareness of the Divine, and his profound connection with it is just one aspect of how Al-Husayn (as), on the day of Karbalah, was the representative of all the prophets that

had come before him. And although only six are mentioned in the famous *Ziyarat Warith* – Adam (as), Noah (as), Abraham (as), Musa (as), Jesus (as), and Muhammad (saws) – it is without doubt that when he fought, he did not fight for himself, or only for the message of the Prophet Muhammad (saws), but he struggled and sacrificed to preserve the message of truth and justice that all the prophets had brought to humankind down through the ages. Therefore, we are going to analyze him as the heir of all the prophets mentioned in the salutation, as well as some of those who have not been referred to but whose teachings, nevertheless, have obvious parallels to those of Imam Husayn (as).

Imam Husayn is the heir of Adam (as)

Assalaamu a'layka yaa waaritha Aadama s'ifwatillaah – *Peace be on you, O inheritor of Adam, who was sincerely close to Allah.*

Adam (as) was the first Prophet of Allah (swt) and the *ziyarat* begins with this salutation. We will therefore begin with a quotation from Ibn 'Arabi's *Fususs al-Hikam*, followed by a relevant clarification about its inner meanings, found in Al-Kayssari's *Matla'u khussus ul-Kalim fi Ma'ani fussuss al-Hikm* and Al-Kashani's interpretation.

Ibn 'Arabi said:

When the Divine Providence of the Almighty (swt) was about to view the essence of things on account of His infinite Beautiful Names; or, to put it another way, when He was about to see His Own Reflection in a thoroughly capable universe, fully able to encapsulate everything (as He is Existence, and unquestionably therefore, His Secrets will be revealed based on His creation), He had already created the universe in the form of a lifeless spirit, like an unpolished mirror... this mirror of the whole universe needed to be polished, and that was the wisdom of Adam, as he was the polish of this mirror, and life to this dead ghost.

Al-Kayssari Al-Kashani in *Matala'u khussuss ul-Kalim fi Ma'ani fussuss al-Hikm* said:

The secret behind mentioning Divine Wisdom solely in connection with the name of Adam, is that when Adam (as) was first created to be a vicegerent, and he encapsulated all the levels of this world, he became a mirror for the Divinity, capable of manifesting all the Divine Names, whereas others did not possess such a characteristic, or the capability of that manifestation, therefore it was mentioned as pertaining solely to him.

And while explaining the sentence related to the Beautiful Names he wrote:

While the existence of the whole universe is due to the Divine Names, and the human being is the primordial purpose of the creation in Knowledge, and lastly in Existence, he emphasized that the Divine Reality's creating of the whole universe was due to His Beautiful Names, and established that the ultimate cause of creating humankind is for reflecting Himself in Himself, in a mirror possessing the thorough existence of mirrors, as He (swt) said: I was a hidden treasure, then I loved to be known, therefore I created the creatures, and sought nearness to them by My gifts, thus he witnessed Me. [166]

Creating Adam, and later his partner Eve, reflects the very pure notion that God is creating. The picture associates perfection and love and combines them with the creation of a united world.

Relating to love, creation, and union, it is necessary first to briefly summarize the way in which mystical traditions see the Divine-human-Cosmic process.

To begin with there is the whole and complete reality about which nothing can be said, since it is unconditional and undifferentiated, and about which our expressions are severely limited by the perimeters of language, causing a division of opinions in defining and/or differentiating. However, within the context of this overwhelming reality, scholars of the mystical sciences detect two divine poles: the Unique, absolute, and unchallengeable Subject and the All-Embracing Infinite and indefinable Object. While the former, having suppressed all potential within it in the realm of *becoming*, the latter bears within it the potential for *identity*. Looking at the relationship between these two

poles, they discern two great oscillatory movements, one being the great creative outpouring of becoming, by the absolute who seeks to relate to and reflect Himself as Divine Object. This completely agrees with the famous *hadith*: 'I was a hidden treasure, and then I created the creatures in order to be known.' The other great centripetal resolution is of all and everything being included in the Reflection of the Absolute. However, the creation of a primordial universe without the perfected human being would cause an equivocal result and necessitate the creation of the human being who, in his turn, would bring about the completed harmony, and re-establish the unconditional reflection. Thus Adam, as a new vicegerent, played the last role, and was capable of fulfilling it.

Adding to the same cycle a fundamental characteristic of the divine process of creative expiration and resolving, re-creative inspiration is that of annihilation (*fana'*) and subsistence (*baqa'*) which is the inevitable upshot of the fundamental Oneness of reality.

Here we have the most obscure paradox of love and reflection in that in order to create a mirror, to experience and love it, He must become the other which cannot, in reality, be other than Himself; there must be separation for there to be union which is known and experienced as a union of separates. This union is perceived in that the resemblance will commit himself to act solely according to Divine Will, leading primarily to annihilation (*fana'*) of self and ultimately to Divine Subsistence (*baqa'*). The Qur'an has explicitly referred to this line of mystical reasoning in the famous chapter 55 The Mercy-giving (*Ar-Rahman*):

Everyone upon it will disappear, while Your Lord's face will remain full of Majesty and splendour. So which of your Lord's benefits will both of you deny? (Qur'an 55:26)

Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq (as) said, regarding this Qur'anic verse: 'I swear by Allah (swt), we are the face of the Lord.'

This bi-polar relationship of the Divine to itself as other, which is none other than a pure reflection of itself, is mediated and symbolized in the mystical scholars' scheme by the perfect man (*al-insan al-Kamil*) being the link, the isthmus between the two; becoming the eye by which the Absolute sees Itself as Object, and the sense by which the Infinite responds to Itself as Subject. Man, the symbolic epitome of the fundamental Oneness and yet the medium of bi-polarity, is thus at the crossroads of the interplay of Divine forces, and an essential factor in the divine scheme of things, while simultaneously being an absurdity from his own point of view. Man himself is both a manifestation of unity and a bi-polarity.

Historically speaking, according to Qur'anic narration, when Adam was first created, he was housed in paradise and was warned about a firm enemy who had sworn to misguide him, his sons, and descendents. However, Adam learned another wider lesson concerning knowledge of the two parties on which the whole universe is based. Adam realized that Iblis was the symbol of evil in the universe and that the angels were the symbol of good. Nevertheless, he did not yet know anything about himself. Then Allah made him perceive his true identity, the reason for his creation, and the secret of his glorification. Allah the exalted said:

And He taught Adam all the names (of everything). (Qur'an.2: 3)

God gave Adam (as) the ability to perceive and understand the nature of all things and to summarize them by their names; e.g., 'that is a bird', 'that is a star', 'that is a tree', etc. He instilled within Adam an insatiable need and love for knowledge and a desire to pass it on to his children. This was the reason for his creation, and the secret behind his elevation. Of course, this did not happen as a teacher teaches a student, as God is no ordinary teacher nor is Adam a typical student. Adam was the first human being and these words, this knowledge and insight, were not gained from long deliberation, but in fact were created as an inherent part of him and his intellectual existence. Thus, Adam's words, when said, refer us back to the recurrent theme of eternal subsistence that is associated with his creation.

The aforementioned verses from the Qur'an do not say that he had to be sat down and taught, or that God Almighty contemplated on what He must teach him. Instead, what the verses depict is that the expressions he adopts emerged from within his heart of hearts, from his deepest depths, from all eternity. The request of God and the presence of the angels simply served as an initiator for the activation and articulation of these thoughts, images and ideas. It was none other than God who brought these into being within him. Whether Adam also received a vision, or was solely given inspiration, is unclear. However, one thing is clear: it was inspired in him and then left to be said with his own natural tongue. Thus, after Adam knew the names of all things, along with their properties and uses, Allah presented these things to the angels and said:

Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful. (Qur'an 2:31)

The angels admitted their inability:

Glory be to You, we have no knowledge except what you have taught us. Verily it is You, The All-Knower, the All-Wise. (Qur'an 2:32)

Allah the Almighty then turned to Adam:

O Adam! Inform them of their names', and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the unseen in the heavens and the earth, and I know what you reveal and what you have been concealing? (Qur'an 2:33)

Therefore Adam, as the 'apostle of the Eternal One', the First Prophet, who is acknowledged by these Qur'anic verses as being the normative human being, is the one who releases the particular wisdom, in a particular way, at the right time. The angels realized that Adam was a creature who not only had knowledge about things of which they were unaware, but that he –unlike them – also had the capacity to learn and acquire new knowledge, and that this was his noblest quality. His knowledge had several dimensions: awareness of his Creator, which is the purpose of man's existence and the basis of faith in Islam, the practical intuitiveness he would need to inhabit and master the earth, and the moral consciousness to distinguish between good and evil. All kinds of worldly knowledge are included in this.[167]

Before placing him on earth, God had entrusted him with a house in paradise. He was able to enjoy the sublime garden where his every need was taken care of, secure in the company of his perfect partner, Eve. God promised that he would never be starving or deprived of clothing. This existence can be considered a state of eternity and perfection, with them being almost non-existent essences within the eternal Divinity. So this perfect experience was nothing other than being united with God, of being identified with God in eternity. The sole command he was

issued was not to eat from the prohibited tree. (Qur'an 69:22 and 55:70)

However, this was a testing period which Adam, along with his partner, failed, and in so doing they followed their own desires (the satanic deception) and disobeyed God. They were expelled from the garden and sent to earth to commence their new life. One may wonder why we consider Adam to be the vicegerent of God, and how he deserves the respect he has, because he failed to follow the right path, by allowing himself to be deceived by Iblis. However, Islamic scholars who have studied this issue have concluded that the command from God was not as a Divine Law (*Hukm Ilahi*) but rather it was guidance (*Hukm Irshadi*), where failure to obey should not be considered a commitment of sin.

There is also a tradition that mentions that Adam (as), after his creation, realized that there were many lights around the Holy Throne. He could not suppress his curiosity, and so he asked: "What are these lights?" He was told that they belonged to his descendants: Muhammad (saws) and his purified family.[168] The angels were made to bow down to Adam (as) and he deserved their respect because of those purified holy persons of his progeny, whom Allah (swt) would create of his offspring. They would be born from him. Therefore, there are many traditions which state that the angels' prostration and their respect to Adam was indeed meant to pay respect to the Prophet Muhammad and his household (as). And when we know that Adam was respected because of his descendent, Imam Husayn (as), then everyone will understand that is why we greet Al-Husayn (as) as the heir to Adam, i.e., the chosen one of Allah (swt).

Imam Husayn is the heir of Noah (as)

Assalaamu a'layka yaa waaritha Noah'in Nabiyyillaah – *Peace be on you, O inheritor of Nuh (Noah), the Prophet of Allah.*

Imam Husayn's (as) revolution came at a time when the Muslim people had sunk into a state of deep apathy and decline, as though the very values of Islamic society were being eroded under the burden of oppressive rulers. He set out to save a people who were lost and helpless, a people who had grown blind to the corruption that had taken root in the government of the time. Indeed, Al-Husayn (as), through his sacrifice, not only saved the people of his time, but also saved Islam itself. We are indebted to him, as his message has, throughout history, given hope to those who believe in the ideals of truth and justice, so that they can weather even the harshest storms. And it is for this reason that he deserves to be the inheritor of Nuh (as).

Ibn Arabi wrote: '*Fussu hikmatin subuhiyyah fi kelimatin Nuhiyyeh*' (The wisdom of praising God in the word of Noah.) And *Subuh* is a noun that denotes 'the praised', Ibn Arabi is speaking about 'de-anthropomophisation', saying that even a true slave of Allah (swt), who is absorbed in praise and worship, has no right to claim he is worshipping Him correctly. God is a self-subsisting entity, He does not need the slaves' praise, and, if the servant fails in this duty, it is only he who suffers loss. In theological discussions, many thinkers have drawn the distinction between two types of attributes possessed by Almighty Allah (swt). Those two types are as follows: First, which are inherent to Him, which are essential *(Siffat Adh-dhat)* and those, which manifest themselves from His actions and His relationship with His creation *(Siffat Al-Fi'al)*. Let us elaborate further into these concepts.

For example, although God is our Creator, He was not a Creator until He created, and likewise was not a Worshiped God before being worshipped. However, He has always been One, Eternal, and Self-Subsisting. Therefore within the theological texts one can easily read the familiar distinction that we have just made between Allah (swt) as *al-Haqq al-Qayyum*, and the Allah (swt), as manifested through Reality, who is the God of creation (*Ar-Rabb wa'l Ma'aboud*), and of the human-divine relationship, i.e., the God who is worshipped.

All human beings have a connection with their Creator. There is a tradition which says: 'The paths to Allah (swt) are as many as the number of the creations.' In other words, every act of worship will create a special bond between the eternal essence of the Worshipped and the soul of the worshipper. Each and every one of us has the potential to realize this unique relationship between ourselves and the living God. It is not merely the communication between man and a figment of his belief, a doctrine or concept in his mind, but rather a union between himself and the essence of all existence and being.

And certainly We created man, and we know what his mind suggests to him; and We are nearer to him than his life-vein. (Qur'an 50: 16)

Speaking about praising Almighty God, Ibn Arabi goes on to say:

Know that Praising Allah for the true believers regarding the Divinity is identical with delimiting and setting restrictions. Thus the one who establishes transcendence of God is either an ignorant or an impolite servant. [169]

But truly, even as we praise, remember, and worship Him, we have nothing that we can offer to God and at the same time we can be nothing without Him. Noah (as) provided us a spiritual lesson in following the balanced path between these two poles of the personal, immanent relationship with God while at the same time understanding his absolute power and transcendence (which is of course 'de-anthropomorphic').

Noah (as) had spent 950 years inviting his people – who were steeped in idol worshiping and polytheism – towards monotheism. But only a few of their number believed in him and were steadfast in their faith, while the majority remained lost in ignorance. The majority of Noah's people rejected his message, they troubled and oppressed him, and there came a day when God revealed to him that there was no hope of guidance for them. He revealed to Noah that he should not be concerned for them any longer; he had discharged his duty as a prophet, but the people had ignored his invitation. Finding the situation irretrievable, Noah raised his hands and prayed:

My Lord! Leave not one of the disbelievers on the earth. If you leave them, they will mislead Your slaves, and they will beget none but wicked disbelievers. (Qur'an 71:27)

God accepted Noah's supplication and passed judgement on the people who had rejected him. Their fate was sealed. He instructed Noah to build an ark with His knowledge and instructions, and with the help of Angels. Allah commanded:

And construct the ship under Our Eyes and with Our Inspiration, and address Me not on behalf of those who did wrong; they are surely to be drowned. (Qur'an 11:37)

The Qur'an states:

Then he invoked his Lord (saying) 'I have been overcome, so help me'. So We opened the gates of heaven with water pouring forth. And We caused springs to gush forth from the earth. So the waters (of the Heaven and earth) met for a matter predestined. And we carried him on a ship made of planks and nails. Floating under Our eyes: A reward for him who has been rejected. And indeed, we have left this as a sign. Then is there any that will remember or receive admonition? (Qur'an 54:10-15)
So Noah selected a location outside the city and far from the sea. He collected the necessary materials and began to work night and day. His people, who could not understand why he was building this vessel so far from any body of water, mocked him: 'O Noah! Does carpentry appeal to you more than prophethood? Why are you building an ark so far from the sea? Are you going to drag it to the water or is the wind going to carry it for you?' Noah replied: 'You will come to know who will be put to shame and suffer'. Allah the Almighty narrated:

And as he was constructing the ship, whenever the chiefs of his people passed by him, they made a mockery of him. He said: If you mock at us, so do we mock at you likewise for your mocking. And you will know who it is on whom will come a torment that will cover him with disgrace and on whom will fall a lasting torment. (Qur'an 11:38-9)

The ship was constructed, and Noah sat waiting Allah's command. Allah revealed to him that when water miraculously gushed forth from the oven at Noah's house it would be the sign of the flood, and the sign for him to act.[170]

When Prophet Noah had prayed, Allah answered his prayer. He sent down heavy rains that caused floods that submerged all land and mountains, and the only human

beings that survived were those who believed and came aboard the ship that Noah (as) built.[171] Thus, he saved the believers from the same fate as the wrongdoers.

The same lesson that we have here from Noah (as) can also be found in the thirteenth supplication of Imam Zayn Al Abideen's famous book: *As Sahifat As Sajaadiyya*:

My Lord, were it not, my God, were it not incumbent to accept thy command, I would declare Thee far too exalted for me to remember Thee.
For I remember Thee in my measure, not Thy measure.
And I myself can hardly reach the point where I may be a locus for calling Thee Holy.
Among Thy greatest favour to us, is the running of Thy remembrance across our tongue.
And Thy permission for us to supplicate Thee, declare Thee exalted and call Thee Holy.

This supplication truly embodies the message of Noah (as). Who are we to praise Allah (swt) when it is only with His permission that we are able to do so, and even this is not for God's benefit, but rather our own. Noah (as) had struggled to guide his people to the right way of life – just as he tried to bring them aboard the ark – not because he would have received any profit in saving them from the flood, but because he had been sent to guide them for their own benefit. Yet, despite his efforts, the people remained oblivious to the conditions that surrounded them. Even his own son neglected the divine message, arguing instead in a so-called cool style:

"سآوي الى جبل يعصمني من الماء"

It means that he would go and find a high mountain where he would be safe from the waters.

Man's own disposition, inherent desires, and natural inclinations often cause him to be misled and distracted from the real meaning and purpose of his life. Sadly, he often forgets his own imperfection, thinking that because he is the best of creation he is somehow beyond the limitations that affect the world around him. In fact, the progression of man is such as to deliberately remove these dependencies, to break free of external authorities, and establish himself as the superior being. Yet, for all his efforts and advancements, the human being cannot escape the reality of his own inherent limitation and fallibility. We need only to look in recent history to find examples such as the *Titanic*, a ship which was claimed to be unsinkable, but which tragically sank. Man's pride is merely another limitation with which he deludes himself to believe that, somehow, he can be perfect and eternal, purely because he is able to display ingenuity, and advance himself. In the same way, the people of Noah (as) believed they possessed eternity, believed they were immortal, and would never face death. It was their pride that prevented them from embarking upon the boat that would lead them to safety in this life and eternal success in the hereafter.

Imam Husayn (as), like Noah (as), constantly discussed with and talked to the people. He told them: 'Come to follow me, come to be with me, come on board!' But as with the people of Noah (as), they too had strayed from the right path and his pleas were unable to penetrate their hardened hearts. Al-Husayn (as) tried to uncover, for them, the injustice and hypocrisy which had become so deeply rooted in their society, and to illustrate the tyranny of the government by whom they were manipulated. But they had descended to a position inferior to that of beasts, and were

suffering from a spiritual disease that deafened their ears and blinded their sight. Al-Husayn (as) did not instigate a war when he went to Karbalah, just as Noah (as) had not desired to call down the punishment of God on his people. Both of them had exhausted all other avenues before adopting their respective last resorts.

It was in the aftermath of Karbalah – after the grandson of the Prophet of God had been murdered – that many realized the error of their ways, and it was the cry for justice, the cry for truth, the cry to avenge the blood of Al-Husayn (as) which would later build into an unstoppable torrent, to sweep away the corruption of the Umayyad regime. Imam Husayn's (as) sacrifice was, in fact, the distant echo of thunder before the storm, the warning of what was to come. And it was his message, his preaching, his ideology that formed the ark of salvation for a people lost in a time of untruth and oppression. He sacrificed himself to be himself the 'Ship of Salvation'. It was not a physical ship, as with the Prophet Noah (as), but a spiritual one, offering the tranquillity and security of the soul for all his sincere followers. The Prophet (saws) had said, describing Al-Husayn (as):

"إن الحسين مصباح الهدى وسفينة النجاة."

It means: 'Al-Husayn (as) is the light of guidance and the 'Ship of Salvation,' and this is the reason why he deserves the title of being the heir to Noah (as).

Imam Husayn is the heir of Ibrahim (as)

Assalaamu a'layka yaa waaritha Ibrahim Khaleelillaah – Peace be on you, O Ibrahim, (Abraham) close and beloved friend of Allah!

The Prophet Ibrahim (as) was gifted with spiritual understanding from an early age. Allah enlightened his heart and mind and gave him wisdom even from childhood. Allah the Almighty stated:

And indeed We bestowed aforetime on Ibrahim his portion of guidance, and We were well-acquainted with him (as to his belief in the Oneness of Allah). (Qur'an 21:51) [172]

Ibrahim (as) is known for being the one loved by Allah (swt) and taken as His (swt) friend. He was once asked why Allah favoured him in this way. Ibrahim replied:

For three reasons: I have always preferred Allah's orders to those of others: I was never grieved by what Allah had ordained for me, and I was hospitable to guests night and day. [173]

It is also narrated that the Prophet (saws) said: 'Allah loves those who love Al-Husayn (as).'[174]

The Prophet Ibrahim spent his life fighting polytheism and calling people to monotheism. He did his utmost to make his people heedful of the belief in the oneness of Almighty Allah and of the worship of only Him. He bade them firmly renounce the worship of idols. He said to his father and his people:

'What are these images, to which you are so devoted?' They said, 'We found our fathers worshipping them.' He said, 'Indeed you and your fathers have been in manifest error.' They said, 'Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who play about?' He said 'Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and is the One Who created them, and I am one of the witnesses of that.' (Qur'an 21:52-6)[175]

He said this because everyone, including he himself, was made by the One Creator; they are all, therefore, one of a multitude. In other words, 'The soul, which is the life behind this universe, in its eternal essence or 'being' is associated with 'implicit multiplicity', and is thus able to reflect the Creating God'.

In our eternal state we have within us, implicitly, something of the whole multiplicity of the universe. Humanity, being the microcosm, has within him the infinitude – the infinite multiplicity and reflective character of the universe. In the words 'We are from the Creator, and to Him is our ultimate return' it is probable that what is meant is not the collective 'we', as in compound society or all creatures as complex; rather, what is very subtly inferred here is: we – 'each and every one of us' – are the microcosm of His Almightiness, and solely to Him is our destination. Similarly, each of us has his own contract with God in eternity, just as each of us has his individual path towards our Unique Lord. Each of us is an exclusive and special expression of God, and we have an individual *rabb-marbub* – Lord and lorded relationship with God. Using language, we are always untying, polarizing, and differentiating; albeit the whole sense we are trying to describe, and thus communicate, only vaguely resembles our goal. However, we have no alternative except to use our limited language, but the Prophet Ibrahim was more astute than that. He combined words with actions, as actions can speak louder than words. In his combat, we can observe his words associated with timely actions. It is his call for unity that first identifies him with Imam Husayn (as). He (as) also combined them in his struggle. Imam Husayn's (as) trust in Almighty God (swt), and combat of polytheism was chiefly manifested during the day of *Ashurah*, and his true faith in monotheism is exemplified in his supplication of *Arafat:*

Praise belongs to Allah, who has not taken a son that He might have an heir, Who does not have any associate in His Dominion who might oppose Him in what He creates, nor any protector in humbleness who would aid Him in what He fashions. So Glory be to Him, Glory be to Him.
And I witness, my Lord, by the truth of my faith, the knotted resolution of my certainty, my pure and unadulterated profession of Thy Unity, the inwardness of my consciousness, the places from which the streams of light attach to my eyes...

The Imam (as) is mentioning every part of his body here, and describing how each part is directed toward Allah (swt).

The lines of my forehead, the opening of my breathing channels, the soft point of my nose, the canals of my ears, the parts that my lips close upon.....
All of my bodily members and what was knitted upon them in the days when I was a suckling baby, what the Earth has taken away from me, my sleep, my awakening, my being still, the movements of my bowing and prostrating, that had I taken pains, had I striven from the duration of time, were my life to be extended through all its epochs and ages, I would still not have been able to give thanks for Thy Blessings, except by Thy Grace, which alone makes incumbent upon me never-ending and ever-renewed gratitude to Thee and fresh, ever-present praise.

Every part of Al-Husayn's (as) body has been called to bear testimony to monotheism.

My Lord, since thou has created me and made straight my nature ... My Lord, since Thou has caused me to grow and make good my shape ... My Lord, since Thou has been good to me and given me well-being in my soul ... My Lord, since Thou has preserved me and given me success...My

Lord since Thou blessed me and guided me ... My Lord, since Thou chose me and gave me every goodness ... My Lord, since Thou gave me everything to eat and drink ... My Lord, since Thou enriched me and contented me, and My Lord, since Thou aided me and exalted me. My Lord, since Thou clothed me with Thy pure covering and smoothed for me the way by Thy sufficient fashioning ...

As always with Imam Husayn's statements, everything he says is loaded with meaning. The language he uses may not be symbolic in the abovementioned paragraphs but his underlying message is discernable: When he speaks of his physical existence, he is expressing his complete dependency on Almighty God. The whole supplication is a profound presentation of the tensions and contrast between his earthly existence and bodily needs; i.e., the reality of being a materially existing creature while at the same time being an eternal reality in the mind of God, and the linkage between the two states of being. The details of his body are solely inspirations from which to meditate upon his mortal substance, his spiritual eternality, and the gulf that exists between the two, the link that exists between them and, ultimately, the unity that underlies them both.

In his *Arafat* supplication, Imam Husayn (as) makes it quite clear that there is indeed, only One God. 'You have given me what I need, You gave me food, You made me healthy.' Only You...only the One.

We can see direct links between this spiritual attitude and the teachings of philosophical mysticism. Philosophical mysticism, as presented by Al-Turka in his *Tamhid al-Quaid*, is divided into two main subjects: to understand the One, *al-wujud al-wahid*, and to understand that there is nothing beyond the One; all that exists is nothing but illusion. Thus,

one must first try to understand that there is only One, and then try to comprehend the meaning of this One.

When Al-Husayn (as) is communicating with Allah (swt), he is talking about this divine level of existence, the existence of the One. Al-Husayn (as) embodies the attributes of monotheism and is rightfully addressed as the heir to Ibrahim (as), the friend of Allah (swt). Let us read how he describes his notion of the whole universe's existence compared to Divinity:

(O Allah), how could an argument be given about your Existence by a thing whose total and complete existence is in need of You? Is it that the advent of other than You is such that the like of it (advent) is not present in You, so that the one, other than You, becomes a clear evidence (expression) of Your presence? When did You ever disappear so that You might need proof and logic to lead (people) towards You? And when did You ever become awake and take distance so that Your signs and effects make people get in touch with You? Blind is the eye which does not see You (whereas) You are observing him.[176]

Ibrahim (as) was a perfect example of a monotheist. It is narrated that before he was flung into the fire by the polytheists, the angel Gabriel drew near to his face and asked him 'O Ibrahim is there anything you want?' Ibrahim replied 'Nothing from you'.

The catapult was shot, and Ibrahim was hurled into the fire, but his landing in the roaring conflagration was like a gentle descent from a staircase into a cool and pleasant garden. Although the flames were raging, they did not burn him, for Allah the Almighty had issued His command:

O fire! Be coolness and safety for Ibrahim. (Qur'an 21:69)

The fire submitted to the will of Allah, becoming cool and safe for Ibrahim. It only burned his bonds, and he sat in the midst of the fire as if he were sitting in a beautiful garden. He glorified and praised Allah the Almighty, with a heart that contained only his love for Allah. There was no vacant space within it for fear, awe, or worry. It was filled only with love.

Fear and awe were dead, and the fire was turned into coolness, making the air pleasant. Those who love Allah, as Ibrahim did, do not fear. Almighty Allah declared:

Those (believers) unto whom the people (hypocrites) said: 'Verily, the people (pagans) have gathered against you (a great army), therefore fear them'. But it only increased them in faith, and they said: 'Allah Alone is sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs (for us).' So they returned with Grace and Bounty from Allah. No harm touched them; and they followed the good Pleasure of Allah. And Allah is the Owner of Great Bounty. It is only Shaytan *(Satan) that suggests fear of his Auliya*[1] *to you, so fear them not, but fear Me, if you are (true) believers.* (Qur'an 3:173-5)

The crowds and dignitaries, priests and masses sat watching the fire from a very safe distance. Even so, the fiery inferno began to burn the skin on their faces, simultaneously polluting the air with smoke and ashes, sucking the goodness from it, depleting the oxygen and exchanging the breathable gas for poisonous fumes, nearly suffocating them. It kept burning for such a long time that the disbelievers thought it would never stop.

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[1] *Auliya*: supporters and friends - referring here to the Auliya of Shaytan (Satan), and meaning, therefore, the polytheists, and any other type of unbelievers of the Oneness of Allah and in His Messenger Muhammad.

When it eventually burned out, they were amazed to find Ibrahim emerging from the pit, untouched by the fire. Their own faces were blackened from the smoke, but his was bright with the light and grace of Allah. The raging fire had become cool for Ibrahim, only charring the ropes, which had held him. He walked out of the fire as if he was walking out of a beautiful garden. Cries of astonishment were heard from the astounded heathens. Allah says:

They wanted to harm him, but We made them the worst losers. (Qur'an 21:70) [177]

In the same way, and in comparable mystical rhetoric, Imam Husayn (as) speaks about the perfect approach to understanding the real meaning of a human being's relationship to his Lord. Imam Husayn (as) declares in his 'Arafah supplication:

"ماذا وجد من فقدك، وما الذي افتقد من وجدك"...

The one who lacked and missed you, what did he find? And what is it that he lacks, the one who finds you? Certainly, the one who became pleased and inclined toward other than you, came to nothingness, and he failed. [178]

The root of the Arabic verb *wa-ja-da*, when used in its intransitive and active sense is usually translated 'to find', and in its passive sense 'to be found', that is 'to be', or 'exist'. Doubtless, one can only seek something that one has previously known, and even though this knowledge might be indefinable or elusive, at least the seeker knows, in a general sense, that it exists and that it must be beyond question, fulfilling his expectations. The only difference, after discovery, is that it now becomes more real, and

precisely meets expectations. A deeper delving into this approach, however, reveals that it can also mean 'awareness' (*wijdan*), and even 'intense feeling' or 'passion' (*wajd*). Thus the root in the Arabic word (*wa-ja-da*) contains three most important meanings: 'being', 'awareness', and 'passion', depending on the short vowels and the way it is read. Therefore, it may denote the conscious seeking and detecting subject, its detected object, and the intimately loaded feeling and impassioned tension prior to the act of seeking and preceding it, and the fullness of absolute response and love from the One who is detected. This should create an atmosphere of everlasting imminence between the two. Imam Ali Al-Sajjad, the son Imam Husayn (as), referred to this state in one of his supplications, named 'The Whispered prayer of Lovers':

My God, who can have tasted the sweetness of Thy love, then wanted another in place of Thee? Who can have become intimate with Thy nearness, then sought removal from Thee?[179]

Used in this way, the single root (*wa-ja-da*) applies to this supplication of Imam Husayn (as) and the Arabic is able to convey what is essentially meant by the great unitary concept of the Divine Hadith (*Al-Hadith Qudsi*):

من طلبني وجدني، ومن وجدني عرفني، ومن عرفني عشقني، ومن عشقني (عشقته)[180]

The development in this Hadith is an amalgam of three steps, which are related in two-sided movements: (*Talab -fa-wajada*) seeking and finding, (*wajada -fa-'arafa*) detecting and awareness, and (*'arafa -fa- 'ashaq*) awareness and passion, usually translated as 'the wayfarer's path' but denoting the experience of intense feeling. It seems clear, therefore, that

in formulating his key concept of *the relationship to the Divine Existence*, Imam Husayn (as) was fully aware of the meaning potential of this root.

Historically we can also see parallels in the lives of these two men. Ibrahim awoke one day and asked his wife Hajar to get her son and make preparation for a long journey. Within a few days, Ibrahim started out with his wife, Hajar, and their son, Ismael. The child was still nursing and not yet weaned.

Ibrahim walked with them through cultivated land, desert, and mountains until he reached the desert of the Arabian Peninsula where they continued walking until they came to an uncultivated valley which had no fruit, trees, food, or water. The valley showed no signs of life. After Ibrahim had helped his wife and child to dismount, he left them with a small amount of food and water, barely enough for two days. He turned around and started to walk away. His wife hurried after him, asking, 'Where are you going, Ibrahim, leaving us in this barren valley?'

He did not answer her, but continued walking. She repeated her questions, but he remained silent. Finally, she understood that he was not acting on his own initiative. She realized that this had something to do with Allah. She asked him, 'Did Allah command you to do so?' He replied, 'Yes.' Then his noble wife said, 'We are not going to be lost since Allah, Who has commanded you, is with us.'

Ibrahim invoked Almighty Allah:

O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring dwell in a valley devoid of cultivation near Your Sacred House in order, O our Lord, that they may offer perfect prayers; fill some hearts among men with love towards

them, and (O Allah) provide them with fruits so that they may give thanks. O our Lord! Certainly, You know what we conceal and what we reveal. Nothing on the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah. (Qur'an 14:37-8)[181]

Thus Ibrahim (as) was commanded by Allah (swt) to leave his wife and son alone in a dry, barren place. His wife later became thirsty, and according to historical narrations, she ran back and forth from one side to the other following a mirage in search of water. Of course, she knew deep down within her innermost consciousness that her Almighty Lord would never let her down, so despite being in this predicament for some time, instead of giving up her faith, she placed all her reliance on her Lord, knowing that He would eventually fulfil all of her expectations. As Muslims, we imitate Hajar's search for water by running between the two hills Safa and Marwah seven times, just as she did. In the same way, Imam Husayn (as) left his women and children alone on the plains of Karbalah, crying out in their thirst for water. He was only acting in accordance with the will of Allah (swt). When he was questioned as to why he was going to bring his women with him, associating them in his struggle, the answer was that Almighty God wanted to see them captured.

We can draw yet another similarity between the personalities of the Prophet Ibrahim and Imam Husayn regarding the most severe test that they both went through; i.e., the great sacrifice. When Ismael was born, Allah gave Ibrahim the good news of having a son by the name of Isaac, from Sarah. He immediately fell into the prostration of gratitude.

However, Allah ordered him to sacrifice his firstborn son. In compliance with Allah's order, Ibrahim made him lie

facedown, at which point Allah ransomed him with a great sacrifice. The Holy Qur'an says:

And when he attained to working with him, he said: 'O my son! I have certainly seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; consider then what you see.'
He said: 'O my father! Do what you are commanded. If Allah pleases, you will find me of the patient ones.' So when they both submitted and he threw him down upon his forehead, We called out to him saying: 'O Ibrahim! You have indeed shown the truth of vision and We ransomed him with a great sacrifice.' (Qur'an 37:102-7)[182]

Although his son was replaced at the last minute with a great sacrifice, we see that Imam Husayn (as) went through an even greater test when the members of his entire family were taken to the battlefields during Ashurah, and he (as) lost more than one son; i.e., Ali Al-'Akbar and the one year old, 'Abdullah. They were not even ransomed by a great sacrifice; they, along with their noble father and others, were themselves the great sacrifice. It is due to this great sacrifice that he was worthy of the position of being a genuine inheritor of Ibrahim (as), the love of Allah (swt).

Imam Husayn is the heir of Yusuf (as)

Assalaamu a'layka yaa waarutha Yusuf Nabiyillah – Peace be on you, O inheritor of Yusuf (Joseph), Prophet of Allah

Imam Husayn (as) is the one who we can visit and greet as the heir of Yusuf (as) even though Yusuf is not mentioned in the texts of the famous *ziyarah.* We believe that Al-Husayn (as) embodied the attributes and abilities of all the prophets, even if they were not spoken of in the (Ziyarah) salutation. We have already explained that we can include those prophets who are not mentioned in it, as the same

cause that made him heir to them also applies in the case of all the other prophets.

This is because we believe that the line of prophethood has been, and always will be, represented in the Imams. Imam Ali (as) was the first Imam after the Prophet (saws) passed away, and he was the first to represent all the prophets; in the same way, this knowledge and power was passed on to his heir Al-Husayn (as).

The story of Yusuf begins with a dream and ends with the manifestation of its interpretation. As the sun appeared over the horizon, bathing the earth in its morning glory, Yusuf, son of the Prophet Jacob, awoke from his sleep, delighted by a pleasant dream he had experienced. Filled with excitement, he ran to his father and told him what he had seen:

'O my father! Verily I saw in a dream eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating themselves to me.' (Qur'an 12:4)

His father's face became radiant. He foresaw that Yusuf would be the one through whom the prophecy of his grandfather, the Prophet Ibrahim, would be fulfilled in that his offspring would keep the light of Ibrahim's house alive and spread Allah's message to humankind.[183]

The story of Yusuf (as) is one of the most beautiful stories in the Qur'an, and holds many precious and inspiring lessons. According to the Qur'anic revelation, Yusuf's (as) life began with a dream:

Behold, Yusuf said to his father: 'O my father I clearly saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves to me!' (Qur'an 12:4)

The story of Yusuf (as) finishes in the Qur'an with the following words of Yusuf (as) to his father:

He said: 'O my father! This is the fulfilment of my vision of old! Allah hath made it come true.' (Qur'an 12:100)

The fulfilment of Yusuf's (as) dream was when his father, motherm and brothers saw him sitting on the throne as a King, and bowed to him with respect. He continues:

'My Lord was indeed kind to me when He brought me forth from the prison and brought you from the desert after the satan had sown dissension between me and my brothers. Surely my Lord is benignant to whom He pleases. Surely, He is the Knowing, the Wise. My Lord! Thou hast given me of the kingdom and taught me of the interpretation of sayings. Originator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my guardian in this world and the Hereafter. Make me die a Muslim and join me with the good.' (Qur'an 12:101-102)

Here and at the end of the Qur'anic story, he is alluding to the general tendency in humankind, even in its role as Vice-Regent, and even while receiving priceless gifts from the Almighty, to arrogate to itself titles and attributes that properly belong solely to Almighty God (swt), thus revealing the innate tendency of the ego to *de facto* self-deification. He also reminds us that regardless how elevated a position one may aspire to during his life, this very situation should be considered a kindness from the Lord; and the ultimate wish of a pious person should be to die while being submissive and righteous, as one may join the company of the righteous in the Hereafter. Eventually, he alludes to the tendency of people while representing the Divine Subject to forget or ignore their proper position of

being a slave. In mystical literature, such as in a short poem of Ibn 'Arabi in the *Fusus al-hikam*, one may read warnings to the wayfarer who has achieved a certain amount of success on the path 'to remain firm as the servant of the Lord and not the Lord of the servant'. That is by making false attributions to himself or by forgetting that he would never have achieved anything without the blessing of his Lord.

Another powerful factor in the structure of Yusuf's (as) story is that it is based on a dream, as it begins with Yusuf (as) putting his dream into plain words and terminates with the same dream coming true. Also, his knowledge about the interpretation of dreams saved his life. It was again a dream that secured Yusuf's (as) release from prison, when he was able to interpret the dreams of the king. Imam Husayn (as) shared this vital factor and this attribute of dream interpretation. There was a dream before his birth, there were many during his lifetime, and after his death there was yet another. However, let us first analyse the importance of dreams.

The Importance of Dreams

There is an important connection between dreams and reality. First, it needs to be understood what the word 'dream' actually means. We all sleep and dream, but how many of us actually think to stop and analyze the meaning of this phenomenon. It has been confirmed in the traditions that sometimes a dream was used by a prophet to prove his claim that there exists a world of a methaphysical nature. According to the traditions, there was once a prophet who preached to his people about the reality of life after death. They rejected this notion and argued about the impossibility of living without their material bodies, as this negated the

existence of the real world beyond their material life. Many of their so-called scientists made customary claims about the real world, implying that the religious amongst them lived in some kind of 'dream' world. They asserted that connection between dreams and reality simply didn't exist! However, one night they slept, only to experience how decidedly unpleasant a nightmare could be, in a new phenomenon they had never previously witnessed; in other words, a dream. As soon as they woke up, they went to complain about these nightmares at which point their prophet informed them that this was a proof from their Lord, to convince them of the reality of a world beyond their material life and sense perceptions.

One should first establish the ideas exploring the deep roots of dreams and present a comparative study of both Eastern and Western thought concerning their significance. Even amongst Muslim thinkers, there are various opinions about the definitions of the technical terms employed and used in the Qur'anic verses that refer to dreams.

Dreams actually have great importance in our lives. However, because Muslims are strongly affected by the Western materialist mindset these days, they tend to consider them insignificant; even though they are, in fact, essential for their existence as a phenomenon of life. As we have mentioned above, our Islamic teachings provide narrations about prophets who taught about life after death, even though some of the materialistic among their people persisted with doubt regarding the existence of something they could not see. This prophet, therefore, would ask God to provide proofs to help the doubters glimpse another life with the result that, after dreaming, many would return the following day and ask about the strange things they encountered in their sleep state, in the form of dreams. The

prophet would then reply 'Didn't you doubt the existence of another reality?'

Human beings usually consider dreams to be completely detached from reality; in fact they often consider dreams to be the *opposite* of it. Yet they are not merely a product of this material life; they act as proof that there is another form of existence. So, although many people deny the possibility of other forms of reality, even the pure materialist cannot deny that we dream. Some thinkers have described dreams as being the opposite of reality. However there are Chinese proverbs that state: 'Life is a dream walking' and 'Death is returning home', meaning that this life is a foreign world for humankind, and once a person is dead, only then is he back in his original home. Therefore, many feel that Eastern cultures –compared to the Western – have constantly placed great weight on the account of a non-materialistic world.

In both of the above cases, dreams have been referred to as unimportant and undeserving of attention. Many intellectuals believe this view to be incorrect. Of course they are important! Dreams deserve to be considered, analyzed, studied, and benefited from. Elizabeth Cotworth (20th century) said: 'When I dream, I am ageless', as in when she dreams, she is beyond human limitation. We find in the West the existence of a psychoanalytical school founded by Sigmund Freud. Even this well-known scientist wrote a book totally devoted to trying to understand and interpret the symbolic meanings of dreams. This may reflect the vital position dreams play in lives of human beings.

On the other hand we read of people like Ludwig Furhbauch, for instance, a pure materialist and proto-Marxist, who described religion as a 'dream of the human mind', aiming to trivialize its importance to something

ostensibly detached from reality. However, he was apparently oblivious of the fact that religion has wielded considerable power to make and break history, and to change the shape of the old, the present, and following from that it must contain the potential to change the future of the world.

William Laurels, an American writer, emphasizing the importance of dreams said: 'There couldn't be a society of people who didn't dream; they would be dead in two weeks.' Therefore, we may conclude that a dream has a vital effect on humankind's life on earth, willingly or unwittingly.

Analysis of the Psychological Effects of Dreams

When a person experiences an unpleasant dream, he usually calls it a 'nightmare', a word with strong negative connotations. Someone enduring hardship, torture, or suffering, to almost any degree, is also likely to refer to the experience as a nightmare. It would appear from this, then, that bad dreams can also have an effect of torture, and the psychological effect consequently cannot be denied.

A person continually plagued by nightmares, would not he uncommonly describe his life as some kind of hell? Of course, he would. It cannot therefore be claimed that dreams have no influence, nor connection with our worldly lives. Their psychological potential makes it necessary for us to give them importance and to avail ourselves of a way to understand them as fully as we can.
Dreams are not usually played out in reality, but they carry their own symbolic language. There is a specific term based on mystical terminology *('alamul mithal)*, i.e. the World of Archetypal images. The word *Mithaal* can be translated as

'incarnation' as well as 'image', and is a means to describe, and relate the world of, dreams to the real world itself.

One prophet (as), in talking to his people, had tried to explain that there will be life after death. However, they were unable to grasp the concept that there was anything beyond material existence. When the people slept, Almighty Allah (swt) caused them to have vivid dreams, so that when they awoke they pondered upon the meaning of such a phenomenon. The prophet (as) asked them if they had seen a beautiful Paradise or if they had seen a burning Hell. He explained to them how they had previously only believed in the material world, but now should be able to comprehend the existence of another world where they could enjoy either ecstatic bliss or painful torment. When people asked him about their experience of this other world, he replied that it was a dream.

According to mystical terminology *('alamul mithal)*, the World of Archetypal Images shares some similarities with the world after death. Although one of its literal translations is 'the world of incarnation', it must be emphatically distinguished from anything to do with reincarnation, which is an idea totally alien to our scientific and religious background. We believe in another world that has a connection with this material world but is separated from it. We do not follow the belief of the Hindus etc. as regards reincarnation, but we do believe in a life after death, or in the *('alamul mithal)* World of Archetypal Images.

Sometimes we instinctually feel whether a dream has a good or bad indication. It appears that Yakub (as) the father of Yusuf (as) perceived a special quality in his son's dream and hence advised him as related in the following verse to refrain

from disclosing it. The Chapter of Yusuf (as), verse 5 of the Qur'an says:

'Laa taqsuss roa'yaa keh alaa ikhwaatikeh fa yekeedoo lekeh kaideh' *('Relate not thy vision to thy brothers, lest they concoct a plot against thee.')*

Although Yusuf (as) never mentioned his secret, his brothers nevertheless realised that, for some mysterious reason, their father loved him the most. Their envy of his preferential love for Yusuf (as) was the sole cause that led them to plot against their younger brother.

Yusuf (as) was taken as a slave and brought to work for the king of Egypt. The king's wife fell in love with Yusuf (as) and tried to seduce him. She thought that she possessed Yusuf (as) and this love was born out of that.

It is reported in a tradition that someone approached Yusuf (as) and declared their love for him. He replied that he did not want anybody's love as all his suffering had been on account of 'love'. Because his aunt had loved him, she tricked him away from his familial home, and because his father loved him, his brothers had become jealous and banished him. The love of the king's wife, spurned when he rejected her attempts at seduction, had caused him to be flung into prison; so all the forms of love had caused Yusuf (as) nothing but suffering. The story of Imam Husayn (as) is also full of passion and dreams too. We will highlight those aspects in the next paragraphs.

So far, we have discussed only dreams. However, in Islamic mysticism visions are like dreams and there is no distinction between the two; they are both related to the term *('alamul mithal)* World of Archetypal Images. We will explore these

technical terms later. There is a well known event that occurred between a priest known as Buhayrah and the Prophet Muhammad (saws) as a young man. When the Prophet (saws) travelled with his uncle in convoy to Syria, they stopped in a place where the local priest, Buhayrah, made a point of inviting the travellers to accompany him to his place of worship. However, Abu Talib ordered Muhammad (saws) to remain with the caravan. Buhayrah then asked Abu Talib if he had brought everyone to him, to which Abu Talib replied that he had left his nephew with the caravan. Buhayrah insisted that the young man also be brought. When he came face to face with the Prophet (saws), the priest said 'This is the man whom I have been looking for'. Buhayrah asked the Prophet (saws), amongst other things, if he ever dreamt and, if so, to be so kind as to relate the content of his dreams. The Prophet (saws) replied: 'What I dream, I see when I am awake'[184]. People of great spiritual knowledge and piety, such as the Prophet and Imams (saws), are able to see visions while they are awake. And this is why we are discussing visions under the heading of dreams, treating them as one subject.

Analysis of Dreams and Reality related to Imam Husayn's (as) Story

The 'true dream' is a dream that might come true. In Arabic, this phenomenon is referred to as 'الرؤيا الصادقة'. This kind of dream sometimes does not occur in the form of symbolic language. We believe for example, that Ibrahim (as) saw in his dream a vision in which he was slaughtering his son. He took this as a command from Allah (swt) and proceeded to actually carry it out, before Divine intervention stopped him. The following verse from the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Ibrahim: 'لقد صدقت يا ابراهيم الرؤيا'. The translation would imply that 'you' believed in your dream and it was

meant in reality. However, the son of Ibrahim (as) was a code for an animal to be sacrificed to Allah (swt). Ibrahim was then ordered to slaughter the animal instead of his own son. We say that this is a true dream but it occurred in a decoded way, because the actual interpretation came about.

According to most classical teachings, the world is divided into three domains which are first, the world of power (*'alam al Jabarut)* which is also the world of pure meaning or the domain of pure ideas, then the physical or sensory world (*'alam al Shahada)*, and finally the subtle or intermediate world (*'alam al Latif)* which permits the establishment of a connection between the first two worlds, by making the gross subtle (*lattafa al kathif)*, or by giving a corporeal form to pure meaning (*Tajsim al ma'ani)*.[185]

It has been narrated that, while on his way to intercept Imam Husayn, Hur heard a voice speak to him. The voice was telling him: 'There are glad tidings for you, O Hur, you will surely be in paradise', and he began to question himself: 'How am I going to paradise? Woe upon me, how can I enter paradise while I am about to fight the son of the Prophet Muhammad's daughter!'[186] However, on the day of Ashurah Hur was hesitant to engage Imam Husayn's army. He was asked by one of his companions why he was so afraid, when he had a great reputation for being a man of courage. Hur replied 'I see myself with a choice between hellfire and paradise.' It was then that he rode out to join Imam Husayn (as) and repent for his sins. He asked Imam if Allah would accept his repentance. To which Imam Husayn replied, 'Yes'. Hur then related the incident, which he had experienced while on his way to Karbalah, adding that he knew now that the voices which spoke to him were telling the truth. Imam Husayn (as) told him that he had been guided towards the path of salvation.[187]

These visions occurred while the people in question were awake, making them considerably more real, visible, and powerful. After all, we expect to dream while we are sleeping, but while we are awake and aware it is no ordinary thing to experience a spiritual experience or a vision.
Let us speak about both experiences. On Ashurah, Ali Akbar returned to Imam Husayn and exclaimed, 'O father, this thirst is killing me and the weight of this coat of mail is exhausting me.' Though unable to grant his son's request for a drop of water, Imam began to cry as he said, 'Have patience, O love of my heart. Soon the Messenger will give you the drink from the heavenly container and you will never be thirsty again!'[188] Ali Akbar returned to the battle and as he was struck down with a blow to the throat, he called out to his father, blood flowing from his wound 'O father, accept the final salutation from your dying son,' before crying out as he experienced a vision, 'Look, here is the Messenger of God greeting you with peace and awaiting your arrival! He has quenched my thirst with his (gift of) water (from heaven); after this I will never feel thirst again!'[189]

Imam Husayn (as) attacked the enemies approaching his son. He then took his head in his hands and cried out, saying to him, 'May Allah (swt) kill the group who has killed you.'[190] He added, 'Destruction to this world after you.' Then he put Ali's head in his lap while cleaning the blood from his teeth and kissing his face and said:

'O my son! You too got yourself relieved from worldly hardship and left towards divine eternal bliss.' [191]

In this portion of his words, he contrasts two different states before starting to link them together on the same day.

Therefore, this is the prelude, the initiation – the expression of grief and perplexity about the death of his beloved son. This sentence contrasts his humanity and his feeling about the termination of his son's earthly journey towards his Beloved Lord. It marks a new phase for him, i.e., that nothing in this world will ever connect him to it again. Indeed, it was like this before for Imam Husayn (as), but now he is clear that he will soon meet the same destiny. He gathers the same ideas together at a later stage. During the day of Ashurah he says some remarkable and very daring things about this journey towards Divinity. Here within these moments we have the contrast, the conflict, and the tension. The tension and the conflict are between human nature, which attracts him to this worldly life, and his devotion to his divine principles. This conflict is between this world and the state of the eternal physical presence of himself through his son, and his passion and devotion to his Lord and promise to the Divine Love. He says:

'This world after you is nothing but annihilation..., your father after you has remained alone but will be joining you shortly."[192]

This reflects another vision, that this life has been visualized for him as nothing but total obliteration. Regardless of how long it lasts, it is nothing but an illusion. It became clearer for him that he would join his son shortly. He is keen to inform him that he will not stay long after his beloved son's martyrdom; rather, he will be joining him shortly.

Let us speak now about dreams. The author of a Persian book entitled *Farhangch Ashurah*, meaning 'The Dictionary of Ashurah', has explained every single fact and phenomenon connected to Ashurah. The book presents two people in connection with their dreams. The first dream is a dream of Imam Husayn (as), and the second is a dream of Um

Salamah. The second dream reflects Imam Husayn's (as) birth, while the first dream is related to his final destiny.

The Prophet's (saws) wife, Ummul Mo'mineen Um Salamah was a pure woman, and is reported to have been the best from among the Ummul Mo'mineen. It has been narrated that she came to the Prophet (saws) and told him that she suspected she had had an ominous dream. She was afraid, and told the Prophet (saws) that she had seen a piece of his flesh cut from him, and placed in her hand. The Prophet (saws) reassured her, and told her not to fear as it meant that his daughter, Fatimah (as), would become pregnant, and give birth into her own hands. Fatimah (as) became pregnant and Um Salamah delivered the baby, who was named Al-Husayn (as), according to the interpretation of her dream, which demonstrates that we need to understand dreams by decoding them, rather than in a symbolic way. However, the Prophet (saws) later came to Um Salamah distressed, telling her that he had received news from Jibrael; his grandson Al-Husayn (as) would be killed by the Muslims. The Prophet (saws) gave her a piece of earth from Karbalah, given to him by Jibrael, and told her that the day that Imam Husayn (as) would be killed this piece of earth would become red like blood.

Here we have mentioned the connection between dreams and reality. This connection occurred in the dream of Al-Husayn's (as) birth.

Before Al-Husayn (as) went to Karbalah, he visited the grave of the Holy Prophet (saws), where he cried and prayed to Allah (swt). It is reported that he slept for a while and had a vision in which the Prophet (saws) appeared to him saying:

'Where are you, Husayn, where are you, Husayn, we are waiting for you; your brother, your father, your mother, and I, we are waiting for you here.'[193]

Al-Husayn (as) was told that there was a level for him that he could never reach unless he was martyred: *'Ina Lekeh derajeten len tanaaluha endellah illeh bil shahaadeh'.*[194] Imam Husayn (as) would never forsake the religion brought by his grandfather and was prepared to die for it. He knew he would be killed as the reality of the situation necessitated it. We can see the connection between his dream and reality of his mission. When Al-Husayn (as) moved to Karbalah, he had the same dream again, beckoning him to martyrdom, the reality of which was shortly to be fulfilled.

It is reported that in the Prophet's (saws) lifetime, on the 10th day of Muharram, he awoke tired and shocked from his sleep. He (saws) told Um Salamah that he had been in Karbalah and had witnessed the massacre of his family. This was a true dream and happened as the Prophet (saws) had foreseen. In addition, Imam Husayn (as) saw a dream near dawn on the day of Ashurah. This dream can be summarized by depicting a group of dangerously vicious dogs, a bi-colour one of which, being a particularly savage beast, attacked the Imam trying to kill him. He also saw the Prophet (saws) in the same dream, who told him that he was a martyr to his progeny. [195]

When Imam Husayn (as) was killed by the army of Yazid, the earth in the possession of Um Salamah became blood red. And the bi-coloured dog was manifested in the beast 'Shimr', who really was like a savage dog, as he was the one who chopped off Imam's (as) head. In conclusion, we have seen that Imam Husayn's (as) life commenced with a dream

coming true, and his martyrdom was the fulfilment of dreams, dreamt by the Prophet and himself (as).

Thus, we can clearly see that Imam Husayn's (as) mystical ties with the realm of dreams entitles him too to be addressed as the heir of Yusuf (as). Indeed, he was the perfect heir of Josef (as).

Imam Husayn is the heir of Musa (as)

Assalaamu a'layka yaa waaritha Musa kaleemillaah – Peace be on you, O inheritor of Musa (Moses), who received direct communication from Allah!

The Prophet Musa (as) lived during a time when the descendents of Jacob were enslaved and oppressed by the Pharaoh of Egypt, who considered himself to be the living and material incarnation of 'Ra', the sun-deity of Egyptian mythology. The Pharaoh was supported by a wealthy ruling class and powerful priesthood, who commanded the ordinary Egyptians to worship him and the false deities that he claimed to represent. It is impossible to determine whether such beliefs were willingly accepted by the general population, but we can be sure that the autocratic nature of Pharaoh's government meant that his commands were enforced as law and any sort of dissent would have been met with the most brutal repression. Successive dynasties of rulers had governed Egypt on this basis, their power cemented by the support of the upper echelons of the social order and enforced by their soldiers.[196]

In this society, the people of Musa (as) were considered little more than slave-labour; subjected to daily humiliation and maltreatment. Like any nation who have endured oppression for many generations, they lacked vision – they

could not recall their days of freedom – their perception and their judgement was limited to the most basic of material necessities. Their concern was not for God, but for their own survival. In this state of deep and total decline, they did not recognize the need for revival; they only recognized their own dependency on the Pharaoh for all their needs. They ignored the call of Musa and were unwilling to join him in his struggle.[197]

There is a saying: 'لكل فرعون موسى', which literally means 'For every Pharaoh there shall be a Moses'. In other words, wherever there is oppression there shall be one who stands up for justice, wherever there is falsehood there shall be one who speaks the truth, and wherever there is darkness, there will be one who revives the light. Yazid b. Mu'awiyah was the Pharaoh of his time, the tyrant against whom Imam Husayn (as) rose as reformer, and living embodiment and successor of Musa (as). In his book *Murooj al-Zhchab* the Islamic historian Al-Masoudi wrote:

Yazid was a pleasure-seeker; he kept many hunting animals: dogs, monkeys, and leopards. He arranged parties in which wine was consumed. After the murder of Imam Husayn (as), he and Ibn Ziyad sat together and drank one cup after another of wine... Yazid can be compared to Pharaoh for his injustice... In fact, Pharoah was better in the treatment of his subjects; he was more just with all classes of his society. In other words, he was a better ruler than Yazid. [198]

Although Al-Masoudi's book is a historical account and not a text on mysticism, the similarities between the situations of Imam Husayn (as) and Prophet Musa (as) remain clear. The conflict between Musa (as) and Pharaoh is not an isolated incident in the history of man. It embodies an eternal struggle between justice and oppression, a struggle which will continue to be repeated in all times and in all

places, taking on new forms, new faces, and new names, throughout the continuing history of humankind.

The actual events that took place in the court of the Pharaoh are described in Surah Ta-ha of the Qur'an (Chapter 20, Verses 58-76).

Pharaoh had challenged Musa to prove that he was indeed the Messenger of God, accusing him of being a mere magician and claiming that his own practitioners of magic would be able to overpower him in a duel. Pharaoh's magicians confidently threw their staffs and ropes onto the ground and transformed them into snakes. Then at God's command, Musa threw down his own staff, which became a gigantic serpent and devoured the conjurations of the magicians. Everyone who witnessed this demonstration could not help but recognize who, out of the Pharaoh and Musa, was the true representative of the Divine Entity. The same magicians who had challenged Musa now prostrated themselves on the ground and declared 'We believe in the Lord of Musa and Aaron'. But Pharaoh, although defeated, was too arrogant to submit to the truth himself. He accused the magicians and Musa of staging the demonstration and (in accordance with the oppressive nature of his regime) threatened the magicians with the most brutal of reprisals should they refuse to forsake their belief in God. However, they remained steadfast in their conviction. What exactly was it that could produce such a total and irreversible change in the beliefs and actions of these servants of Pharaoh, so that they were willing to give up not only their irreversible positions, but even their lives, rather than renounce their new faith?

Magicians were amongst the highest ranks of Egyptian society; they were its sages, scientists, and scholars. They were learned and intelligent men who, when they witnessed

a real and tangible serpent materialize before them and then proceed to devour their own conjurations, realized that there was a power involved in these events that was far beyond anything they could equal. Because they were fully aware of the miraculous nature of this event, the magicians were intellectually and spiritually convinced that Musa had brought to them authentic revelation from the absolute and all-powerful Creator. This is what produced such a sudden and revolutionary transformation in their hearts and their minds, which is ultimately illustrative of the Islamic philosophy of belief and its conceptualization of spiritual (or emotional), and intellectual (or rational) certainty as well as the effects of these on a 'wayfarer' towards God. Logical arguments and realities which lead the individual to a deep and profound realization of his Creator's existence – and the spiritual experience associated with this – in turn give rise to a state of total submission within him.

It was on the day of celebration (*Yawm al-Zeenah*), which we are told by many narrations to also be the day of Ashurah, that these events took place. Pharaoh attempted – through his magicians – to use deception and subterfuge in order to undermine Musa (as). He and his supporters came with tricks and illusions, but they were unable to match Musa (as), who exposed the falsehood of Pharaoh's claims through the miracles, which God performed through him. Pharaoh had claimed to be an incarnation of divinity, but Allah (swt) had said to Musa (as): 'Do not fear, for you are exalted, a magican can never be successful'. But, although the path of righteousness was plain, and a group of the highest members of their society (i.e., the magicians) had declared their belief in the message brought by Musa, the Egyptian soldiers remained inactive. If they had, at this moment, risen up against Pharaoh, then the history of Egypt would have been very different. But instead, they remained as motionless and indifferent observers to the events before them. They

were too afraid to take destiny into their own hands and choose the path of truth, too weak-willed to support justice and embrace what they knew to be right. They later paid the price for such apathy and drowned in the waves of the Red Sea as they obeyed the orders of their Pharaoh and pursued the people of Musa. [199]

In the same way that the Pharaoh had attempted to deceive the Egyptian people with the illusions of his magicians, Yazid endeavoured to mislead the people of Iraq through a campaign of propaganda and rumour against Imam Husayn (as). Just as the people of Musa (as) had fallen into a deep state of ignorance, Imam Husayn (as) witnessed the descent of the Muslim *Ummah* into apathy and decline. It was through their sacrifice, and through his martyrdom, that Al-Husayn (as) and his companions would revive the consciousness of the Muslims and remind them of their duties. The victory of Imam Husayn (as) at Karbalah was not a victory of physical force over physical force – we know that it was on this barren plain that he and his company were murdered – rather it was a victory of truth over falsehood. It was the tragedy of Karbalah that exposed the corruption and tyranny of the Ummayad dynasty, and it was the name of Al-Husayn (as) that would inspire countless revolutions throughout history. And, although on that day the oppressors may have thought themselves victorious, history attests that in the years that followed they would meet their end at the hands of those revolutionaries determined to follow in the footsteps of Al-Husayn (as).

Imam Husayn (as) can also be considered to be the inheritor of Harun (as), the brother of Musa (as). This is of course referring to the line of Imamate and the pattern in which the essence of prophethood is passed on to the Imam and successor. So just as he is the successor to Musa (as), he must also be the successor to Musa's (as) own successor,

Harun (as). Like his brother, Harun was both an Imam and a Messenger. Even after their freedom from Egypt, the people of Musa continued to be concerned only with the accumulation of wealth. And when Musa (as) was called for his mystical communication with God, Harun (as) was left in his place. Yet, on his return, Musa discovered that his people had been induced to worship a golden calf and they had come close to murdering Harun when he had tried to prevent them from doing so. Not content with idols of stone, the Israelites worshipped idols of gold, idols which represented their intense desire for wealth. The incident of the golden calf is fully symbolic of the spiritual disease that existed in the hearts of the people at this time.

Greed is ever-present throughout history. In every time and place you will find those people who worship the 'golden calf', an idol that we are all capable of creating and harbouring within ourselves. In the time of Al-Husayn (as), the Ummayad household and their allies were well known for their love and hoarding of wealth. Take the example of 'Uthman, one of the ten people allegedly promised paradise, according to certain narrations of Sunni hadith, or 'Abdur Rahman ibn 'Awf, who possessed 10,000 camels and 1,000 horses and each of his four wives received 84,000 gold dinars as 1/32 of the inheritance left after his death! Unfortunately, many of the Prophet's (saws) companions, especially those connected to 'Uthman and the Ummayad family became enamoured by wealth, and we can see a comparison between them and the worshippers of the golden calf. Sadly, they suffered from the same spiritual malady as the people of Harun (as).

There is also a parallel between Musa (as) and his brother, and Al-Husayn (as) and his brother. Imam Hasan (as) had been forced by circumstances to capitulate to Mu'awiyah's rule and wait for Al-Husayn's (as) revolution. In a similar

way, Harun (as) had to wait for the return of Musa (as). It is narrated that Musa (as) was younger than Harun (as), but nonetheless had a higher degree of prophethood. In the same way, Imam Husayn (as) was the younger of the two brothers, but again possessed a higher reputation of Imamah. The chain of Imamah descended from his progeny, and his sacrifice at Karbalah has led him to become an eternal Imam.

Imam Husayn is the heir of Jesus (as)

Assalaamu a'layka yaa waaritha Isa Ruh'illaah – Peace be on you, O inheritor of Isa (Jesus), the spirit of Allah.

According to Ibn Arabi, Jesus (as) was a *muhiy*, a reviver of the dead. He was able to miraculously heal the sick, return the dead to life, and create new life from inanimate matter. This power was derived from the *Ruh*, or spirit of Allah (swt) from which he was created in the womb of his mother Maryam (as). These interconnected attributes are the famous qualities of Jesus, and it is through them that he and Imam Husayn (as) share a commonality. Aside from the power of revival, both Jesus and Al-Husayn were born from purified mothers, Maryam (as) and Fatimah (as), two of the perfect women of Paradise, and both were fully formed only six months into pregnancy.

Whereas Jesus (as) is famous for the revival and healing of the body, the curing of physical illness and disability, and the rejuvenation of life in the dead, the medicine of Imam Husayn (as) was not physical; it was political. In his time, the sickness did not belong to the bodies of individuals, but to the body of society. The Muslim Ummah had lost its life and passed into a state of torpor. The people had become apathetic and neglected their duties, forsaking the true and

correct ideology of Islam for the subversive values of the Umayyads. Under their government, the Islamic nation had fallen into a state of decay and corruption. Mu'awiyah, the instigator of this dynasty, is accredited by many Islamic historians with introducing the hereditary principle of succession to the Muslim world. The earlier rulers of the Muslim Ummah had not adopted such a system; in fact, the dynastic concept was brought from the empires of Persia and Byzantium, which – ironically – had been largely conquered by the Muslims by this time.

Perhaps the most worrying symptom of decline was that most of those people, who were aware of the direction in which Islam was being driven, lacked the conviction or the courage to take decisive action. Imam Husayn's (as) call to revolution was met with an apathetic and at best half-hearted attitude from the Muslim political body, i.e., the masses. For example, it is narrated that one such individual who, although recognizing the truth, was not prepared to join Al-Husayn (as), and instead contented his conscience by offering a single horse out of the thousand he owned. This incident was by no means an isolated one. In fact the reaction displayed by this man was endemic of a much wider section of society; a symptom of a nation that – however large or prosperous – was dying on its knees, under the weight of a tyranny endorsed by widespread apathy.

One factor in particular that made the revival of the Muslim Ummah more difficult was the vast territory that it covered. It was no longer the case that the boundaries of Islam were confined to the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula; they now stretched from Egypt to the farthest reaches of Iran. The technological limitations in this era meant that it would take days or perhaps weeks for news or messages to reach their destinations. The Umayyads were very efficient in their control and manipulation of information, which is one

of the reasons why Imam Hasan (as) had capitulated with Mu'awiyah. Not only did he recognize the need to prevent bloodshed and civil war between Muslims, but he was also aware that, in the event of a conflict, Mu'awiyah was in a better position to control the news reaching the outermost provinces. Mu'awiyah was a capable and experienced politician, which meant he would almost certainly be able to manœuvre the situation to his own advantage, as he had done previously in his conflict with Imam Ali (as). However, his successor, Yazid, lacked the political acumen (and skill in practising hypocrisy) of his father, and he later proved incapable of silencing the cry for justice that would rise from the bloodied plain of Karbalah.

Even as a child in his mother's arms, Jesus (as) had spoken out against the false accusations of the Jewish priests. And it is narrated that while 'Umar sat on the pulpit of the Prophet Muhammad (saws), delivering his Friday sermon, a young boy rushed into the mosque and demanded: 'Get down from the pulpit which belongs to my father.' That boy was Imam Husayn (as). We see that, just like Jesus (as), he challenged the corrupt authorities and spoke out against injustice and deception. While thousands remained confused and apathetic, Imam Husayn (as), like Jesus (as) before him, refused to stand by and allow the religion of truth to be overturned and distorted by a fraudulent establishment. When he rose and marched to Karbalah, he set out to cure a misguided and weak society, a society that had abandoned the teachings of the Prophet (saws) and had adopted the practices of the decadent Persian and Byzantine empires that had come before them. This was an *Ummah* in desperate need of revival, a revival that would be brought about by the inheritor of Jesus (as), who gave life to the dead.

A famous scholar and historian, Irshad ul-Bari, wrote that 'Islam had its birth in Mecca, its growth in Madinah, its

decay in Damascus and its death in Baghdad.' He was, of course, referring to the triumph of Islam under the Prophet (saws) before it was corrupted in the hands of successive tyrants – first from the Umayyad and then from the Abbasid dynasties – who enthroned themselves as rulers over the Islamic empire. However, it is impossible to believe that Islam could or would ever die, and although it underwent a deep decline in the hands of tyrants and usurpers, Islam was revived and restored by the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (as) on the plains of Karbalah! Without Al-Husayn (as), Islam would never have recovered from its regression; the *Ummah* would never have been revived from its sickness without the blood of Al-Husayn (as). It is for this reason that Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Kashif al-Gheta said in his works that:

Islam's existence is because of Muhammad but its continuity is because of Al-Husayn.[200]

Al-Husayn (as) is truly the reviver of the *Ummah*, and although he may not have healed anyone in his lifetime, there are many narrations that if a sick person ingests clay from his shrine the illness will be cured, and a consensus amongst jurists based on those narrations that this exception from the general rule prohibiting the eating of earth is permissible.[201]

We describe Imam Husayn's (as) martyrdom at Karbalah as a victory not in a military sense, but in a spiritual one. Imam Khomeini describes Muharram as a month of epic heroism and self-sacrifice. Al-Husayn (as) and his companions were heroes, and they achieved a victory not in spite of, but rather *through* their death. For in carrying out the lesser struggle (the physical combat) they, in fact, illustrated their triumph in the greater struggle (the struggle against the 'self'). From their death would resonate a call throughout history; a

condemnation of falsehood and injustice, a challenge to oppression and exploitation, and a cry against tyranny in all forms. This was an absolute, eternal, and everlasting victory, far greater than any temporal success achieved on the battlefield. Muharram is a month in which tyrants and oppressors have been crushed by the mere utterance of truth. Sayyida Zaynab (as) and Imam Ali ibn Al-Husayn (as), through their bravery in challenging the lies of the Umayyad regime, and through their eloquent defiance of Yazid's despotism, brought the message of Al-Husayn (as) to the very heart of the cruel dictatorship which had usurped the leadership of the Muslims, and in doing so they were truly victorious. Muharram is a month in which we have been shown the way of heroism, a month in which we have been taught how to fight against oppression in all its forms, and a month in which the path of freedom and justice has been made clear for us. Imam Husayn's (as) message is truly universal in that it surpasses all boundaries of nation and community. His refusal to accept humiliation or oppression is a call that resonates within the consciousness of every human being.

There are those who do not agree that Imam Husayn (as) brought about an Islamic revival. They say that the *Ummah* was not dead or even in need of reformation, preferring to believe that the decline of Islam was limited to a small cadre of corrupt individuals who had seized power. Yet, if this is true – and if our belief is little more than an emotional and baseless exaggeration – then why was it that the majority of people who encountered Al-Husayn (as) were too afraid to join his struggle, despite the fact that they recognized the legitimacy of his movement? If the *Ummah* was without need of an Islamic restoration, then why were so many of its people afraid to die in the path of truth and justice? It is only for the one without faith that death represents an end to be

feared. To the true believer, death is little more than the point of departure from this world into the next, a bridge between realities and forms of existence. Out the hundreds of thousands of Muslims at the time, there was only a handful willing to give their lives for justice, to make the ultimate sacrifice for truth and cross that bridge of death at Karbalah. Imam Khomeini said, regarding the revival role of Imam Husayn (as):

The martyrdom of [Husayn] revived the religion. Through his death, the religion rose to life and buried the despotic regime of Mu'awiyah and his son. The martyrdom of His Holiness Imam Husayn (as) was a success for Islam.[202]

He also said:

The martyrdom of the Master of the Innocents, Al-Husayn (as), and of the supporters of the Qur'an on the Day of Ashurah marked the beginning of the immortal message of Islam.[203]

He emphasised in another statement that even reward was not the question for him, when he said:

The Master of Martyrs was killed, but he had not acted for any reward. Reward was something out of the question for him. He took action to save the ideology, to advance Islam and revive it.[204]

And in more recent times, Imam Khomeini himself can be considered a reviver of Islam. It was his opinion that whatever we have today as Muslims we owe to the sacrifice of Imam Husayn (as) on Ashurah. The tragedy of Karbalah played a dominant role in the Islamic revolution of Iran, through which Imam Khomeini revived society in his own unique way. One particular example of the effect of Karbalah on the consciousness of the revolution was the

massacre of the religious students at the *Feizieh* seminary. The Shah's soldiers cut them down while they commemorated Ashurah on the 15th of Khordad (according to the Persian calendar). This day is remembered as another day of Ashurah, another day of struggle against tyranny, and another victory of Islam over oppression. Imam as-Sadiq (as) said it best:

Every day for us is Ashurah, and every place for us is Karbalah.

Imam Husayn is the heir of Muhammad (saws)

As-salamu aleyka ya wareth Muhamadin Habibil Allah – Peace be upon you, O heir of Muhammad, the one beloved by Allah (swt).

One of the main characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad (saws) is that he was the most beloved by Allah (swt) of all creation. Al-Husayn (as) is described by many reliable historians and biographers as a perfect example of his grandfather. For in him we find the full manifestation of the Prophet's (saws) incredible intellect and sublime character. Al-Husayn (as) truly was the son of a perfect household, a fact that is reflected in his own awe-inspiring personality. Amongst the obvious traits that the two share are their perfect physical composition, their nobility, and their courage.[205]

In Al-Husayn (as), we encounter the living reflection of perfection, which is why Ibn 'Arabi provided in the final chapter of his work *Fuss hikmatin fardiyyah fi kalimatin Muhamediyyah* an explanation of the unique wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad (saws), beginning with why he was of truly inimitable insight. Ibn 'Arabi stated that Muhammad

(saws) is the maxim of humanity, the pinnacle of existence to which all creation aspires, the most perfect being in the universe. And this is why Allah (swt) began creation with the what is called in mysticism as: '*al-haqiqah al-Muhamadiyyah*'. Although we know that this is not what we grasp as the physical existence of the Prophet (sawas), but it is a reflection to his perfection, as he is the best of all creation, and completed divine prophecy with him, the highest of all the messengers and seal of the prophets (as).
If God created the universe to be a mirror of His being, then Muhammad (saws) is the most sublime of all reflections, because he possessed '*Jawami'e al-Kalim*'; all the encapsulating perfect expressions. And, in reality, although he is part of this world, he is not something separate which is 'like' God, but ultimately he is nothing except the most perfect indication of the divine '... thus to maintain his own integrity', i.e., his existential and ontological integrity in essence human, but in nature godly, and this is the real meaning of the Qur'anic verse, when describing the Prophet (saws):

(دنا فتدلى فكان قاب قوسين أو أدنى)

So he was the measure of two bows or closer still. (Qur'an 53 :9)

Therefore, the perfect human being is the complete manifestation of the Divinity, regardless of which race, colour, or gender. Within the ideology of Islam, a woman can achieve the same level of perfection as a man, and many scholars have brilliantly expounded the profound significance of this point. Ibn 'Arabi, in the final chapter of his *Fuss al-Hikam* – which is dedicated to the explanation of the Prophet Muhammad (saws) – has elaborated that the male symbolizes the divine subject, while the female represents the divine object, each contemplating and completing the divine in one another. They are united

together in humanity, but separated by their respective essence and functions, both seeking in the other their fundamental oneness, longing to abolish their separation and distinction through a love that will lead to the experience of absolute otherness, which is so essential for a conscious union. The Prophet (saws) provides a brilliant exegesis of this concept in his saying:

Three things in this world of yours have been made beloved to me, women, perfume, and prayer.[206]

The perfect man is precisely the mediating aura of the divine Self-experience, while uniting with its resemblance.

Prophet Muhammad (saws) is also known as *Habib ul-Allah*, which means that he is loved by Allah (saws) and that he loves Allah. Although in Islamic Mysticism the Arabic word *hubb* is used to describe divine union, love, and self-manifestation together; it is usually translated into English as 'love', which can carry with it some misleading connotations. We must be careful of how we define this term, as 'love' is suffused both which Christian associations as well as romantic and sexual suggestions (especially within the common usage of Western societies). It is also important for us to remain aware that there are many modes of what we refer to as 'love' and not all of these are positive. The scholars of mysticism obviously understand the word in its most positive (or spiritual) meaning in the context of their cosmogony. 'Love' is perhaps the only term we can find to express the intense, urgent striving of the eternally emergent and susceptible (that is, susceptible to an experience of God) essences to realize their infinite possibilities within the absolute existence of God. In other words, this is the only word we can use to describe that process indicating the desire to be born again into a higher

existence, to achieve true self-realisation and to become intimately aware of the Divine.

The key Arabic term 'رحمة', which is usually translated with the English word 'mercy', is often associated with Divine love in Islamic literature. Allah (swt) is always named *Ar-Rahman Ar-Raheem* (The Merciful, the Compassionate). However, one must avoid any form of deceptive connotation that might accrue to this translation. The Arabic root of the word *ra-ha-ma* also means – in another reading with a slight change of the short vowels – 'womb' with all its associations. A female – as she possesses a womb – is described by Islamic traditions as a Mercy *(Rahmah)* because she represents divine love and desire for self-revelation in the existential forms of the great act of creation. Thus, one should realize that, in this context, 'love' is a way of describing the Divine Creation'. One may use the term 'love' as the inherent desire on the part of the creative, cosmos-oriented Allah (swt) to be reflected in that which – while necessarily other for purposes of revelation and human guidance – is nonetheless a perfect mirror of Him. While we desire to be like Him, we are at the same time ourselves, and this 'love' represents the paradoxical desire to become as existentially close to him, while retaining our own identity and physical limitations. The former 'love' represents the urge to bipolarisation and diversity, the latter kind signifies the desire to return to His Divine reflection; so the word denotes both movement towards the necessary otherness, which implies selfhood, and movement towards selfhood, in which otherness is latently implicit. It is within this dynamic movement that one speaks about a perfect manifestation of the Divinity.

The Iranian Poet Sa'adi writes describing the Prophet's beauty (saws) the following poems:

بلغ العلى بكماله كشف الدجى بجماله

He achieved the highest level of perfection,
and he enlightened the darkness with his beauties.

It is narrated in the collections of Islamic traditions that 'Allah (swt) is beauty, and He loves everything which is beautiful.' Thus it becomes necessary to discuss what we mean by 'beauty', which is the other aspect of the dynamics of divine love. The word *jamal* in Arabic is translated into English as 'beauty'. It has commonly been understood that 'beauty lies in the eye of the beholder', which is to say that one finds something or someone is beautiful to the extent that it reflects or echoes something precious to oneself, and so awakens in one's innermost heart an intuition of one's own wholeness. This means that because the Prophet (saws) possesses 'beauty' (*jamal*) while being loved by the Almighty (swt) it signifies that he also possesses the eternal intimation of wholeness, because divine 'love' denotes the urge to achieve self-reflecting and self-echoing wholeness. It is precisely for this reason that the mystical philosophers often say (within the context of Islamic sources and the Qur'an) that the best means to contemplate the existence of the Almighty God (swt) is in pondering upon the created world, including all the creations within it. In them He has infused His beauty, and from such beauty comes the reflection of His eternal image. It is within this interpretation that we find Imam Husayn's notion for beauty and esoteric *jamal*.

Again, this interpretation is manifested in Imam Husayn's (as) life and deeds. To mention just one example of his sense of beauty, it has been narrated from the historians that one day one of his slave girls brought him a rose, and presented it as a gift for him. He took it from her, and while thanking

her for it, he elevated her status to that of a free woman. People, who were sitting around him, criticized him for awarding her with freedom merely because she gave him a flower! However, this instance clearly reflects that he realized the meaning of a flower, and all the particular connotations it had for the girl, in her act of giving it to him. It also reflects his sense for beauty, and the intense feeling he had for it, to the point that it forced him to express his personal thanks in return for such a noble human feeling, by thanking the slave girl for the gesture of her gift, by making her free. Obviously, Imam Husayn (as) deserved to be called the 'heir to the Prophet' (saws) because he possessed the same qualities and manifested the same characteristics as the latter did. The Prophet (saws) said:

Husayn is a part of me, and I am part of Husayn.[207]

It is quite logical to claim that Al-Husayn is a part of the Prophet, but the opposite has its special meaning, which is only addressing the people of elevated love and passion for the beauties and the special Divine qualities, which are reflected in the Prophet of Islam and his most beloved grandson Al-Husayn.

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191. Zurriya Al-Nijat, p. 128

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End of volume 1

In the Name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful

The Martyr of Freedom

Vol. II

ETHICAL CONCEPTS AND SOCIAL ANALYSIS FROM AL-HUSAYN (AS) THE MASTER OF MARTYRS THE GRANDSON OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD (SAWS)

BY

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Chapter 1

Lessons from 'Ashurah'

Imam Husayn's Story as a Source of Inspiration

History provides us with a source of knowledge for the present as well as for future generations. It is the mirror of nations, a reflection of social identity, and without doubt it holds the key to future prosperity. A people who inherit a glorious history will always be proud of it. It plays a vital role in man's development, for example, with the invention of letters, writing, and symbols. History is alive, a testimony to the human race's natural instinct to live and to be remembered.

One may claim that the value of a society is measured purely by reflecting upon its history. However, its value can also be determined by its reaction, and the lessons it has learnt from events. The success of a nation lies in its ability to produce a movement, founded on lessons learnt from the past, being completely aware of the nature of its beliefs and consciousness. There will be times when a nation may be forced to stop and reflect on certain experience, judge itself accordingly, and take heed of the lessons learnt for the future. The fate of any society that does not practice this method will inevitably be one of self-destruction.

Imam Husayn's story, i.e., his revolution, is one of our greatest teachers, providing us with an ocean of knowledge. By studying this revolution, we can contemplate and analyse the achievements

and failures of humankind. Vital lessons can be learnt and precepts established. Humankind is trying to move towards perfection and achieve harmony in life, and this is the reason for its constant state of change. By studying the conduct of Imam Husayn (as) and his devoted followers, generations have been inspired, and we can read the consequences of their actions in historical records. Using such information will help us assess and guide our decisions today, and improve our achievements for tomorrow. The Qur'an employs the method of highlighting the fate of past nations and individuals to communicate this point to us. We are repeatedly reminded of the consequences that befell the perished nations such as the *'Ad, Thamud, and Madyan*[1], and the fate of tyrants, such as Pharaoh.

Human nature does not fundamentally change, and we often see, to coin a phrase, 'history repeating itself'. Patterns can be discovered, and valuable insight gained, which we can employ to help improve ourselves, and to make wise and informed decisions. We are all responsible for our own deeds and have to accept the consequences of our actions. By looking into history we can take heed of the results of differing kinds of human behaviour.

Human beings have the need to know where they came from. Although Allah (swt) is the source of all creation, man has a natural need to trace his 'roots'. The tragedy of Karbalah enables us to understand humankind's cultural background, and it gives us inspiration. The tragedy gives us a sense of context, and humankind can see itself in perspective with what has gone before. We can learn how revolutions and reforms evolved and emerged, how cultures developed, and how customs came about. The tragedy of Karbalah is, thus, important in understanding the changes that occurred within the Muslim *Ummah*, and how and why such changes occurred.

Islamic historical sources provide us with Imam Husayn's heritage and culture; these can serve as a source of inspiration. Whichever part of the tragedy we ponder over and reflect on, as devoted Muslims, we can find a pertinent lesson for our Islamic destiny. The traditions describing the story give us the desire to improve our everyday actions, as there is a need to achieve a better

tomorrow, when we become aware that we have such a great source of inspiration in the past. Obviously, by studying the life of Imam Husayn (as) and those of the great personalities who supported him, we can discern what it entails to be a true believer.

History can provide us with role models, ideals to which we can aspire through emulation. We can see how far we fall short, and try at least to attempt to improve. By studying their lives of others from the past - their trials and hardships - we can see how blessed we are with what we have. When we are under trials ourselves, we seek solace in knowing that what we are enduring is no worse than what others have already been through.

The Need for a thorough Legendary Example

> *If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched others. Such days (of varying fortunes) We give to men by turns: that Allah may know those that believe, and that He may take to Himself from your ranks Martyr-witnesses (to truth), and Allah loveth not those who do wrong.* (Qur'an 3:140)

As the Qur'an eloquently explains, misfortunes experienced by one person are not exclusive and unique to him alone, nor is it the case that none has suffered like him. The natural state of events can be observed. Everything materialistic dies a natural death, a common destiny for us all. Yet qualities and attributes do not change or die with history. Virtues such as generosity, honesty and patience are unaffected by time, as are the evil desires of man, such as power and greed.

One of the most important teachings of the Qur'an is that one should follow an ideal, which must fulfil a human spiritual and material need. Ayatollah S. M. B. As-Sadr states in this regard:

> *An ideal is a thing which man always keeps in view, by which he is guided and to which he is absolutely devoted in his life. He continues to advance along the line, determined by his*

> *ideal. It may also be called his aspiration and ideology. It is a man's motivating force.*[2]

Although we believe that a Muslim's ideal is solely the Almighty (swt), throughout history people who do good deeds and perform exemplary acts are also considered to be examples of divine obedience, and as such are individuals to be followed and imitated. In numerous verses in the Qur'an, Allah (swt) emphasizes the importance of being just, and of following the principles of justice. It is important to follow and remember these principles in all aspects of life, and in particular when remembering the tragedy of Ashurah. Some Shi'ah Muslims, in the past, wrote letters to the Imam of our time, Imam al-Mahdi (as), the awaited saviour, during his minor occultation, as they were not even able to imagine how Muslims could commit such a criminal act. That generation of Muslims was even stated by the Qur'an to be an *ummah* possessing elevated faith and piety. Muslims in later generations began to find great difficulty in accepting that such an event could have happened: how Imam Husayn (as) could ever have been killed in such a merciless way. Imam Mahdi (as) replied to numerous questions on this topic in one letter, written in his own handwriting. After answering the numerous questions on various other topics, he came to this question regarding Imam Husayn's (as) martyrdom, i.e., doubting its occurrence, and described the person who denies this fact as a disbeliever (*Kafir*). In reply to the doubt from some Muslim groups, our Imams (as) have also made statements in a similar fashion. Imam Ali Al-Ridha (as) simply said:

> *And all of the (eleven) Imams after the Prophet (saws) were killed, some by the sword, as in the case of the commander of the faithful and Al-Husayn (as). The tyrants of their time killed every one of them, and indeed this was done, contrary to what is claimed by the extremists* (ghulat) *and the delegators* (mufawidhah), *may Allah (swt) curse them. They say, 'They (the Imams) were not killed, and it was only a likeness of their affair that happened to them.' So they lied; may the wrath of Allah (swt) be upon them.*[3]

And based on the overwhelming historical evidence, as well as the numerous prophetic narrations regarding the fate of his (saws) grandson, it is clear that to deny such an event is a serious historical crime, and hence the Imams emphasized its seriousness. They described such an impostor as (*Kafir*) disbeliever, and cursed him.

From another point of view, one may argue that societies need legends, or legendary characters. For example, hundreds of years ago, in pre-Islamic times, people in Iraq invented a legend about the *Malhamat Gilgamish*, who was supposed to have been a man striving for eternal life until he eventually got it. The people of that time taught their children the principle that if they worked and fought hard enough, like this exemplary individual, then they too could achieve their goals, and that they should therefore emulate his endeavours. As a result, *Gilgamish* became one of society's great heroes, despite that fact that he did not actually ever exist at all. However, some will always be sceptical and deny the existence of such legends even if, as in some cases, the evidence is in their favour. This is often seen when we consider the case for the existence of the Imam of our time, Imam al-Mahdi (as). The Arab sociologist *ibn Khaldun* in his famous book *Muqadamat ibn Khaldun* denied the existence of Imam al-Mahdi (as). However, numerous other sociologists, as well as religious scholars, have strongly disputed his opinion. The point of view of denying the existence of the Imam still exists today, regardless of sectarian affiliation, and even within the Shi'ah themselves. However, the question arises as to how someone can deny the existence of a person whom they have not seen, and whose identity they do not know. Some argue that, just like all 'legends', there is a reason why the Shi'ah in particular 'invented' such a person and the idea of 'mahdism'. Some argue that 'it could be asserted that the Shi'ah belief in al-Mahdi is a legend, which is something born from a variety of socio-political factors...' e.g. the oppression of the Shi'ah people throughout history necessitated them to invent this legend, along with the political ideology of the Shi'ah, i.e., its doctrine of Imamah, and the influence of Persian Shi'ah converts, who mixed their former beliefs and legends with Islamic beliefs, etc. However

the idea of denying the existence of Imam Mahdi (as) has many weaknesses in its argument.

The difference between legend and fact is that, although both may represent the culture and mentality of a society, a legend can never be proved, because it is a product of the imagination, whereas a fact is based on rational arguments. As legends are products of the imagination, most are based on principles that are detached from reality. For example, the story of *Gilgamish*, previously mentioned, is based on a man trying to achieve eternal life. However, the story of Imam Husayn (as) is not based on any such surreal principles; he was simply killed, and if one wishes to visit the site where it happened (Karbalah), and where he (as), his family, and companions are buried, one is able to do so. Therefore there is physical evidence for the existence of the account. The story of Imam Husayn (as), despite being true, encompasses all the ideal principles of how one should be, and how one should treat others (Muslims, non-Muslims, Allah, family members, animals etc.).

In the case of treating other Muslims, it is well known that the Prophet (saws) once said: 'The *ummah* is just like a human body'; i.e., that all parts need to act in harmony, and that what affects one part of the body will affect the rest. One of the companions of Imam Husayn (as) had been fatally wounded in the battle, and on seeing this his brother rushed to his side. After realising there was no hope for his survival, his brother asked if there was anything he could do for him. In his dying words he replied, 'Follow this man [Imam Husayn (as)] and never leave him alone.' Some of the companions wanted to pray, and in order for them to do so, their fellow companions created a human shield to protect them from the oncoming barrage of arrows and spears. These people were the epitome of how one should act. According to a tradition, these people were just like 'the helpers or companions (*howariyeen*) of Isa (Jesus) (as)'. As for the opposing army, composed of people who, despite calling themselves Muslim, were not strong in faith, Imam Husayn (as) did all he could to guide them, as he was afraid that they would go straight to hell on account of their actions of fighting and killing his family, companions, and, of course, himself. He and his party did all they could to preach to the army of Yazid,

and guide them away from their dangerous wicked path, until many of them cried, 'Enough! We no longer want to listen.' Therefore, instead of simply worrying about their own lives - which would not have been an immoral thing to do, considering they were being attacked - Imam Husayn, his family, and his men even felt mercy towards their attackers.

With regard to Imam's relationship with non-Muslims, there were, for example, some Christians who heard about a man named Imam Husayn, and what he stood for, so they left everything, and went to Karbalah. When the Imam heard about them, he felt it was his absolute duty to care for them, feed them, and look after their animals. However, they did not manage to get there in time to help him, as they reached Karbalah when Imam Husayn (as) had already been martyred. It has been narrated that the priests, who saw the decapitated head of Imam Husayn (as) as it was carried from Kufah to Sham (Syria), saw a bright, shining face. In awe, they asked who it was, and what had happened. The soldiers carrying it told them. Still awestruck, one of the priests asked if he could have the head for a few hours. Of course, the soldiers initially denied this, only relenting when they were offered money; a situation which reveals their mercenary mentality. While the priest had the glorified head of the Imam, he took it back to his house, cleaned it, washed it in rose water, and was so affected by its presence that he took the *shahadah* that night.

The Imam's relationship with the female members of his family and companions has been described as one of the best amongst all Muslims. It has been narrated that Imam Husayn (as) addressed all the female members of his family: 'Allah (swt) is with you, He will support and help you, and they (Yazid's army) cannot do you any harm, so do not lose your patience.' It has been narrated that Imam Husayn's daughter had so much love for him that she could not handle such a tragedy, and was so overwhelmed by the pain of her father's fate that she passed away because of sorrow. The sister of the Imam, who he knew would be the one to carry on and pass on his message after this tragedy, was part of his heart and he thus treated her so.
The first member of his family who decided to go and join the fight was his devoted and beloved son, Ali al-Akbar. This boy has been

described by Imam Husayn (as) as having the most similar features and character to the Prophet (saws), as he said in his words: 'If we ever loved to see the face of our Prophet, we would look at his (Ali al-Akbar) face.' After fighting for a while, he could no longer withstand the thirst; he stopped fighting and returned to his father. Being put under such tremendous pressure from the enemy, and being given this near-impossible request, most would get angry. But the Imam (as) replied to his beloved son: 'Put your tongue inside my mouth.' 'Why?' asked Ali, 'Because I want to show you how thirsty I am', replied the Imam. After placing his tongue inside the Imam's mouth, Ali al Akbar realised how thirsty his father was, and how dry his mouth was. Ali al-Akbar then returned to battle, and was later martyred. This broke the Imam's heart: 'What does this life have of meaning after you? You are now free from all the hardships of this life, so we should not be worried about you.'[4]

Even the way the Imam treated animals, especially his horse, has been documented as exemplary. On one occasion, the Imam (as) managed to pass through the enemies' troops and reached the waters of the Euphrates. He was alone; most of the companions who had been with him were cut down. All that was with him was his horse. The horse, like every member of the Imam's army, was thirsty, as they had been cut off from this supply of water by the opposing army. Both the horse and the Imam wanted to drink, but, out of respect for his horse, the Imam told him that he was not going to drink unless the horse drank first. It has been narrated that it was as if the horse understood what the Imam said, and did not drink. Shouts were then heard from amidst the battle: 'Do you enjoy drinking water while your wives, sisters, and family are being attacked by the enemy?'

Of course, he did not even drink a single drop of water, and returned to his camp. Once he returned, everyone was crying of thirst.

Once his child was slaughtered in such a dreadfully merciless way, he did not take him back to the tent of his mother, knowing that she would not have been able to bear seeing the body of her slain six-month-old son in front of her eyes. So the Imam took him to

his sister, Zaynab (as), the aunt of the martyred baby; and even she could not bear to see how heartlessly the cruel enemies had murdered him.

The Imam's brother was desperate to fight, but the Imam replied to him: 'Have you not heard what our family are crying: 'Thirst! Thirst! We need water for the children.' Al Abbas (as) then went immediately, cutting through the enemy army to get water. But he was not able to bring any back to his brother, Imam Husayn (as). The Imam cried, 'My back is now broken,'[5] just as Luqman al Hakim had done, according to historical narrations.

The horse *(Dhul Janah)*, realising that the Imam was dying, covered his face with the blood of the Imam (as), and returned to the camp to bring back the sad news. According to the narration, the horse was neighing. Imam Sadiq (as) said that this horse was informing the family, and in so doing was simply stating an historical fact. He interpreted this neighing to mean: 'What a disaster! What a disaster to a Muslim society that has killed the son of the Prophet.' Therefore, this horse was not a normal horse, and the relationship Imam Husayn (as) had with him meant that the horse, commonly known to be an emotional animal, was deeply moved by the death of his master, to the extent that it went back to the camp to inform the family members. Afterwards, the women of the camp went out shouting: 'Are there any men here?' There were only the women and the horse, because at this time, Imam Sajjad (as) was sick, and, as has been narrated, Imam Husayn (as) had to protect this son, and left him to prepare for the difficulties his family would face in the near future. Not everything should be lost in this battle; somebody must survive.[6]

The fact behind all this is that the tragedy of Imam Husayn (as) was not a limited case, rather an all-encompassing story, and a thorough source of inspiration. When Imam Husayn (as) started his mission, it was not based upon his own desires. According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad (saws) gave orders to every one of these successors. Imam Hasan (as) was ordered to capitulate, Imam Husayn (as) was ordered to fight. He is not a mere person; he is a symbol of all the injustice occurring from his own time onwards, and until the coming of Imam al-Mahdi (as). As such, it

is our duty to keep his memory alive, until the return of Imam al-Mahdi (as). In the *Ahadith* we see that four thousand angels are crying for the tragedy of Imam Husayn (as) until the Day of Judgment.[7] This reflects the position of this great man in history, and how his enemies were false examples of righteous human beings. Despite their attempt to create a good image of themselves, they failed in the long run. The absurdity of this is plain. Imam Husayn (as) is, and will remain, a unique symbol for fighting against injustice all around the world, for all time.

In conclusion it is vital to understand the past, and to study Imam Husayn's (as) life as a source of inspiration, so that we can understand the present, and plan for a better and a more prosperous future.

Lessons from 'Ashurah'

> *...I call on you to abide by the Book of Allah and the practice of His Apostle (saws). The Prophet's practice has now been put aside, and heterodoxy revived. Should you grasp my words and obey me, then I will most certainly lead you along the path of righteousness. And may Allah bestow peace and mercy on you.*[8]

In this quotation we detect a tone of concern that Imam Husayn (as) has realized that the Qur'an had been forsaken and the Prophet's (saws) practice had been forgotten. He was, therefore, calling on people to revive the Qur'an's teaching as well as the practices of Islam's Prophet (saws), and he asked them to follow him, in order to lead them along the path of righteousness. Al-Husayn (as) considered questions of state, politics, the Muslim *Ummah*, and leadership or Imamah from the perspective of the Qur'an. In contrast, Yazid viewed these questions from his fortress of oppression. Leadership, in the eyes of Al-Husayn (as), was a vehicle to place the *Ummah* on the road of guidance and reform, a means to nourish people with divine laws and build their

characters, and a tool to organise life, and develop it towards good and perfection.

In his view, the Islamic state has the underpinnings of Islam, according to which it formulates its regulations and its cultural values. The state organs are assigned the task of protecting the principles and aims of the *Ummah*. These organs are authorized by the *Ummah* to institute rules, uphold justice, and provide services. In all this they are answerable to the *Ummah* and Allah Almighty (swt).

Reviewing the Imam's letters, arguments, sermons, and correspondence along with the political, economic, and social circumstances of the time, we can deduce the following realities:

1. Oppression and monopoly of power on the part of the Umayyads was a fact. A distinct political class had taken shape. A tribal-based party came into being, which was the Umayyad group. It monopolized power, wealth, and administration, whereas the majority of the people were deprived of these instruments, so much so that the state became the private property of the Umayyads.
2. Murder, terror, and shedding of blood prevailed.
3. The *Ummah*'s wealth was wastefully spent. A capitalist class came to light beside poverty and destitution. The majority of government officials were lacking the qualifications to discharge their duties.
4. Behavioural deviation became a social phenomenon. Corruption crept steadily into public life and its symptoms appeared in both individual and group behaviour.
5. Law took a leave. The whims and private interests of the rulers and governors were substituted for the Shari'ah at critical points in the life of the *Ummah*.
6. A group of people, assigned the task of distorting the traditions of the apostle of Allah (saws), and forging new, false traditions appeared. Dialectic groups, such as the fatalists were formed, to find suitable pretexts for the deviant political behaviour of the rulers.

History conveys to us figures and accounts, attesting to the decline of social morals, and the gap that yawned between people and divine values. An in-depth study of that epoch would maintain that the uprising of Imam Husayn (as) was an historical necessity. The deteriorating situation generated the motivations that led to the revolt. Al-Husayn (as) was left with no choice except rising against oppression.[9]

We are about to study and analyse the lessons of a great man to humanity. He was not an ordinary individual, but an astute Imam, a profound thinker and wise leader. A man who deserved what the Prophet (saws) said, describing him:

> *Husayn is from me, and I am from Husayn.*[10]

He speaks about the most complicated issues in an easy style, and deals with the very esoteric aspects of human feelings in a most eloquent way. He lived fourteen centuries ago, yet to this day we are of the firm belief that his lessons are eternal, as they serve for all cultures and societies, of all diversities. Indeed, they are for humanity in general. However, an important cultural point needs to be addressed here: the Imam applied his teachings in the traditional form of the Arabic language, a complicated method of expression that was used in those days, and which differs very much from ours. Thus we are confronted with a complicated case of *cultural reception* - such as the bundle of absolutely different methods and metaphors - which forces us to reflect and think profoundly in order to find the real meaning of those traditions, as they were narrated from Imam Husayn (as).

We ought to realize that a great many different elements are involved; historical, political, cultural, religious, economic, etc., in order to be, at least tolerably, able to orientate ourselves in the field of semiotic, as well as semantic changes, which have taken place in the course of such a reception. We need to have access to a relevant and appropriate method that can consider and deal with a whole spectrum of issues at the same time. Otherwise, we will be reduced to historical or descriptive ways of looking at things.

In this regard, we have implemented an approach; the Qur'an and the traditions from those days, traced back to that epoch, and we will try to employ it with reference to this period.

Now, even if we initially feel content with such methods, sooner or later, we will try to find appropriate points of connection between the expressions Imam Husayn (as) used that belonged to the past and the sayings of present-day thinkers. The establishment of such points of connection is, of course, important, as long as they get no further than demonstrating the contrast and similarity between the past and the present, and no more than this.

What we need, then, is a method that will enable us to deal with such elements that have determined the thinking of Al-Husayn (as), as well as his mode of expression.

This section of the book is devoted to his sayings and expressions, which are counted as lessons. These lessons can be learnt from his life, prior to the tragic events of Ashurah, and during that battle. These lessons are vital, I believe, in order to call ourselves *bona fide Muslims;* we have to be guided and inspired by him in our lives. Al-Husayn (as) sacrificed himself for something precious. His martyrdom was, undoubtedly, not his ultimate goal, but is a source of inspiration for humankind. His actions have to be an example to us; through Ashurah he intended to teach us the real meaning of certain values, such as what it means to be a real Muslim.

The benefit of learning from his lessons does not simply result from chanting Al-Husayn's (as) name. It is necessary to chant his name, but at the same time we have to understand the meaning of his revolution. We need to ask ourselves what message Al-Husayn (as) left for the Muslim generations to come. The reviver of Islamic teaching in our modern time, the late Ayatullah Khumayni states:

> *While the loss of the Master of Martyrs was the greatest loss, he knew what he was doing, where he was going, and what his aim was; therefore, he made sacrifices and was martyred. We*

> *must count on those sacrifices, bear in mind what he did, what torture machinery he destroyed. And what have we done?* [11]

We shall now proceed with the creative, political, and social lessons that one is able to derive from the example and teachings of Imam Husayn (as), which is the main goal dedicated for the third part of the book.

Chapter 2

Fundamental Thoughts

The Aim of Creation

If one observes a living cell, the smallest unit of any living organism, one will find that it resembles a miniature factory. The cell merely receives a series of simple external inputs, and maintains steady chemical reactions in order to sustain balance with the environment. It has no consciousness, and has no feeling of any kind of suffering, since it is totally unaware of its own existence. But, by compounding a million of these inanimate drops of organic substances into a mass, a collection of interdependent units, we create the human, capable of feeling, perception, and thought. A human being has capabilities beyond this, and these are an unparalleled treasure unknown to the rest of the animal kingdom. This endowment is not merely the blessing of consciousness, but the power of contemplation and reflection. How powerful it is that human beings, endowed with awareness and understanding, empowered with logic and reason, bequeathed with free will and conscience, walk and reflect about the aim of their creation! After being given life from the most insignificant drops of fluid, they have, through the grace of God, evolved to a state of noble eminence, becoming the elite of the living realm and the epitome of biological and spiritual perfection. Allah (swt) has told us in a *Hadith qudsi* that,

> *I was a hidden treasure and I created so that I would be known.*

We were created out of His Love and Mercy. Just as it is a natural human desire to procreate and have children, and then to educate and perfect them, we are to some extent imitating our Creator. If we can understand our love for creation and perfection, we can, to a limited degree, understand why Allah (swt) created us.

We are told in Chapter 51; verse 56 of the Noble Qur'an the reason for our existence:

> *I created the Jinn and Humankind only that they might worship Me.*

To worship Allah (swt) is to bring our will into complete submission with His. Worshipping entails knowing and understanding, and to know Allah (swt), we first have to understand ourselves. The more we contemplate about our miraculous creation, the more in awe of Allah (swt) we become. Gradually we realise how our complete being depends on Him. It is mentioned in a tradition that 'If you want to know Allah, know yourself...and if you want to know yourself, know that you are nothing.'

Innately, human beings have a longing to return to their Creator, as He is the source of our complete existence. When He created us, He breathed of His 'Spirit' into us. It is this that provides us with the longing to return to Him and desire to seek perfection. We have been placed on Earth as Allah's (swt) vice-regents and have the responsibility and the potential to manifest the Divine attributes within ourselves. This is the aim and the way to seek nearness to Him. Allah (swt) is the Most Perfect, so we have to strive towards perfection; He is the Most Loving, so we must love; He is the Most Patient so we must develop patience; and He is the Creator, so we should procreate.

Life is a gift and should not be taken for granted; the only certainty within life is that we will die and face our Creator. We have been blessed with the endowment of freewill and the power of intellect. This gives man the potential to soar beyond the realms of the

angels, but, if misused, to sink to a level lower than the beasts. It may be asked, why we were granted free will and the possibility to sin and go to Hell. The answer is that Allah (swt) is Just. Through striving we attain our own salvation and the heavenly reward will taste sweeter, as do the fruits of any labour. We will know that if we are punished for sins, it is because of our own actions; we cannot blame anyone else, least of all Allah (swt). Through the struggle in this life, with all its various implications, it is possible for us to reach the lofty ranks of Paradise and to truly come to love Allah (swt). If this were automatic, without any suffering or toil we would surely fail to appreciate His real mercy.

It is necessary to understand the meaning of happiness and how it is inextricably intertwined with suffering. On the whole, life in this world is suffering, and only the inexperienced or the very foolish imagine otherwise. The human being is able to reflect upon and to interpret events, and to represent them in a rational form. He has the ability to reflect upon his life, and its suffering, from an outside point of view, and to uncover the philosophy behind this suffering.

There are thinkers, such as the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), who posited a unity between suffering and true love. He argued that there is no true love save in suffering; in this world we have to choose either love, which is suffering, or false happiness. Unamuno did not realise the correct meaning of happiness. From a holistic view, suffering and pleasure mixed together will ultimately lead to happiness. The mystical poet Rumi said, 'Man is more man – that is, more Divine – depending on how great is his capacity for suffering and anguish.' Others, such as Heinrich Suso, realised that suffering is the ancient law of love. There is no quest without pain; there is no lover who is not also a martyr. Thus, as Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923), a New Zealand–born British author states, 'Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. Suffering, then, must become Love, and this is the mystery. And if mankind suffers, we should thank God, for it is a sure sign that man is alive.'[12]

Islam, unlike Christianity, possesses no notion of suffering for original sin, or suffering from or because of the sinful nature of life

itself. Acceptance of suffering, in the Islamic concept, does not imply 'bearing the cross' for others, but rather implies accepting suffering as the basis for spiritual growth and nearness to Allah (swt).

This subject of suffering, as a general notion, appears to be as old as humanity itself. Æschylus said: 'Wisdom comes through suffering, alone,' confirming that suffering helps in acquiring wisdom. Aristotle said: 'Suffering becomes beautiful when anyone bears great calamities with cheerfulness, not through insensibility but through greatness of mind.' In the Bible we read:

> *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord.*[13]

American preacher and writer Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) said that suffering is a part of the Divine idea, because man cannot remake himself without suffering. He is both the marble and the sculptor. One must live this life and take the challenge, because for suffering and enduring there is no remedy but striving and doing.[14] From a secular point of view, human beings are threatened with suffering from three directions. They endure suffering from the body, which is doomed to decay and dissolution, and must make use of pain and anxiety as warning signals. There is suffering from the external world, which may rage against humankind with overwhelming and merciless force. And finally there is suffering borne from relations with others - and this last source is perhaps more painful than any other.[15]

From a believer's point of view, life, with all its suffering, is to be analysed from three different angles.

*** Pre-Earthly Life:**

When Allah (swt) created Adam and Eve, they were sent to enjoy life in paradise. There were no limitations for their pleasures, and all their needs were secured. The Qur'an has described their condition by saying:

> *Verily we had covenanted with Adam before, but he forgot; and we did not find in him any intention (to disobey us). When we said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam,' they prostrated themselves, but Iblis did not, and he refused. Then we said: 'O Adam! Verily, this is an enemy to you and your wife, therefore let him not drive you two out of the garden, (for then) you shall have to toil. Verily, it is ordained that therein you shall not go hungry nor shall you be naked, nor shall you be thirsty, nor shall you feel the heat of the sun.*[16]

All of Adam and Eve's needs and comforts had been provided for in the life of bliss. Adam and Eve were living in paradise, yet there is no mention of heavenly bliss (the nearness and the pleasure of Allah).

Satan had no idea of such a place. He only saw the comforts of Adam's home, and out of spite and vengeance decided to take him out of there and throw him in the land of test, toil, and hardship. Adam was advised not to approach the tree if he wanted to live in bliss. Otherwise, he would have to leave it and go into the world to face its hardships. Adam, apparently, chose the life of the world.[17]

Satan came to them and said: 'This is the tree of eternity.' Adam and Eve replied: 'How can we believe you when Allah (swt) said to not eat from this tree?' Shaitan said: 'I swear by Allah (swt) that this is the tree of eternity.' He finally succeeded in seducing them into eating from the tree of temptation. When they had eaten from the tree, they were sent out of Paradise to Earth. They would live on Earth, as humans deserve to live after deciding to eat from the tree.

* Earthly Life:

> *And whosoever does good deeds, and is a believer, there shall not be fear or injustice, nor any curtailment (of what is his due).*[18]

When Adam and his wife came down to Earth, a new era began for humankind. Life now meant suffering and love, and to survive meant finding some meaning in this suffering. When they learned how to procreate, and set out to start the human race, they stood for all human beings. It is up to each individual to perceive life on earth as suffering or enjoyment, as mortality or eternity. But this depends on how one perceives love, suffering, mortality, and eternity.

Some thinkers[19] have chosen to say that we must choose hardship for ourselves, because it is our only defence against that hardship. This is what is meant by accepting suffering. Those who, by their very nature, can suffer completely and utterly, have an advantage. By making it our own choice, we can disarm the power of suffering.

It is quite true what philosophy says: that life must be understood backwards. But it makes one forget the other truth: that it must be lived forwards. The more one ponders over this, the more it comes to mean that life, in the temporal existence, never becomes quite intelligible, precisely because at no moment can one find completion. It is love that transforms all the suffering and misery into a sweet experience, as Rumi writes in his *Mathnawi:*

Through love bitter things seem sweet,
Through love bits of copper are made gold.
Through love dregs taste like pure wine,
Through love pains are as healing balms.
Through love thorns become roses,
And through love vinegar becomes sweet wine.[20]

And, with love, one is able to discover the real meaning of eternal life, and the true meaning of happiness. That which was hard to suffer is sweet to remember.[21]

Coming back to the story of the martyrs of Ashurah, one can read that they were in the process of experiencing a sense of spiritual pleasure while they were suffering. The closer they were to death,

the happier they became, and it is narrated that their faces shone more brightly the closer they were to death. They were suffering, but they understood the meaning of life. Whatever happened in their lives, they were happy because, in the end, they were truly victorious.

It is knowledge of Allah (swt), and the heart which is full of love for Him that hold the magic to lead a person to success, and direct him to eternal life and happiness.

As narrated in the Bible: 'It is good for me that I was afflicted that I may learn Thy statutes [Psalms 119:71].' Thus if one learns from one's suffering, and really comes to understand the lesson he was taught, it is then that he may be able to help others who are going through similar experiences. Perhaps this is what life is all about. And perhaps by love one is able to prepare for the life hereafter, for then one realizes that Almighty Allah (swt) did not create human beings for destruction after death, but rather death is like entering the door of another world, an eternal world of pleasure for the believers. In some traditions, death has been referred to as a bridge over which people, at the time of transfer from this world to the next, shall cross to reach their goal, which is the hereafter. It is narrated that Imam Husayn (as) said a similar statement on the day of Ashurah, speaking to his loyal companions:

> *Remain firm, O sons of noble people, because death is just a bridge that will carry you and transfer you from discomforts and troubles into the extensive gardens of Paradise. So which of you does not desire his freedom from prison to enter a castle? Of course, death for your enemies is like being transferred from a palace and a castle into prison and torture.*[22]

Thus we understand that, whilst being a servant of Almighty Allah (swt), human beings are free from suffering and can all enjoy the highest level of perfection. Another philosopher, Leo Tolstoy, presents the case:

Without knowing why I am and why I am here, life is impossible.[23]

Indeed the question can be heard from a believer as well as from an atheist. We have to refer again to the first humans, Adam and Eve. The story is that they were in the garden enjoying a state of unaware perfection. Then temptation came to them through Satan, who declared: 'I swear by Allah (swt) that this is the tree of eternity.' He succeeded in enticing them into eating from the tree of temptation, they ate from the forbidden tree of eternity - to become immortal - and then fell after transformation into a new state of trial - life on earth. They were placed here in order to strive for a state of aware perfection. However, on Earth there were other tasks that included reproducing the new generation, who will inherit the earth and rule over it with God's blessing.

Thus, our souls had a taste of paradise before we came here, and we naturally desire to return to that blissful state. The aim of creation is thus to live eternally in paradise, and any struggle we experience in this world would not be seen as 'suffering' in the literal sense, but rather a means to achieve internal peace and eternal happiness.

We can take the day of Ashurah, which shows that Imam Husayn (as) and his companions were the best examples. The closer Imam Husayn (as) and his companions came to death, the happier they were. In historical records we read that the closer they were, the more their faces were shining. This historical fact reflects that Imam Husayn (as) and his companions had perceived that happiness could not be attained without knowing Allah (swt). Once they reached that stage, they were ready to receive the final reward.

So how do we know Allah? A tradition says that if you want to know Allah, know yourself! Another tradition says that if you want to know yourself, you must realize that you are from God and to Him will you be returned. Therefore, one can claim that we are nothing in the sense that, whatever we are, it is because of the faculties Allah has given us. He has breathed some of his Spirit

into us. We can find in ourselves a tiny fraction of Allah's Attributes, which we have to fulfill or achieve consciously or unconsciously. If you observe around you, you can understand the love behind Allah's (swt) creation. God is the Creator and He is taking care of what he has created. He is *Rab al Alameen*, meaning the Lord Cherisher of His Creation (of all the worlds).

Allah (swt) is the Most Perfect; therefore, we should strive towards perfection. He is the Most Loving, so we also have to love. He is the Creator, so we also imitate Him in creation, through being the means by which God achieves his goals. We struggle to have children because we love, and in order to follow the Divine example we teach them and pass on our love, care, and knowledge, so that they may become appreciative of the Divine as well.

One might argue that we act on 'instinct' or on an 'urge' in order to keep humankind safe from extinction, but the fact remains that we still have a choice whether to have children or not. If we choose not to have children, we deprive ourselves from the wonderful experience of caring, giving, sharing, and receiving all these in return. We are, in a way, trying to achieve godliness, while at the same time being servants of Almighty God. In conclusion, we can say the following:

- If we are suffering, then it is meant as a means to moving towards perfection, as we are following the Divine example. Whilst studying each of humankind's living periods we have found no notion of imposed suffering, rather people struggle to be the best, which will result in eternal happiness.
- This life is meant to be a manifestation for the Almighty's reflection in each person, we are, therefore, procreating children in order to live within the framework of the Divine plan for humanity.
- All that seems to be misery is considered by Imam Husayn (as) to be a taste of Divinity, attracted by its magnitude to move forward towards it.

One has, at least, received a good lesson, inspired by Imam Husayn (as), as one has gained the knowledge and the meaning of a discerning life for humankind, where there remains no space for misery, but rather prosperity and human dignity instead.

The Perfection of the World

We know that every branch reverts to its root, no more in any way than when it has sprung forth, and we are aware that all that creation is - all that has come forth from God, the All Knowledgeable - returns. There is no whit enlarged, or increased, in any way other than what was eternally in the mind of God. As Almighty God, to Whom is the ultimate return, is the most perfect, everything struggles to achieve perfection. The cosmos, the world and everything that surrounds us, is nothing other than the manifestation of the perfect existence *(kamal al-wujud)*. This is the basic tenet of Imam Husayn's (as) view regarding the perfection of this world. We are nothing other than God's means, we have no being other than for His being and it is only in His experience of selfhood that we have any selfhood at all. Therefore, any notion that we constitute something to God is folly. Whatever we may believe of God or ourselves will not affect, in the slightest degree, this reality: that ultimately, we are, and there is, nothing other than a reflection of Him.

In conclusion, this notion is incredibly intricate, and full of content, and has the power to provide a lot of material for thought every time one ponders it. The full flavour of words of wisdom like these is only tasted by those predisposed to receive it - to them it will open, like a flower, and reveal its treasure in due season.

The revolution of Imam Husayn (as) was about creating harmony and a perfect world. He foresaw the future of Muslim society as doomed and full of gloom, and he, therefore, declared:

> *Do you not see that right is not being put into practice, and distance is not being taken from falsehood, although the faithful are inclined to these things, so that they meet Allah?*[24]

He, therefore, deemed the situation critical, and through his revolution wanted to bring about change, even if it resulted in his own martyrdom. As he once said, in a famous saying:

> *I do not see (consider) death except as prosperity, and I do not consider life with oppressors and tyrants anything but anguish and affliction.*[35]

Humankind's Tendency towards Perfection

Quantum ovation of perfection...
Oh! How we delight.
Your presence above azure heavens,
Omnipotent;
Your sights set...Iris of brass.
Built promises within the deep chasms of my soul.
My cup intermingled with hope's vows;
Of inspiration and aspirations.
You...
Dew moistened face,
Descended down and abducted me.
Bleached clean... my skin;
The wings of an angel's love.
You...
My dream;
My future told on Sunday morn,
Emptied my pockets of every yesterday.
My spirit; set free.

This is how Samuel L. Ponder expressed himself on the subject of perfection, and how it ultimately led to the freedom, as he mentioned at the end of the poem.

It seems that perfection and responsible freedom are related and associated together; we will therefore be discussing them in the next topics. However, it seems that there are two approaches to

understanding freedom; the first is a responsible one, and the second is irresponsible. The Qur'an tells us about an irresponsible freedom by saying:

> *Have you seen those who take their desires and lusts as god? Can you be the protector over such a person'* (Qur'an 25:43)

This is a question addressed to the Prophet Muhammad (saws) by Allah (swt). It refers to an illness or problem of human nature, found in those who take their desires as god. All the problems and difficulties of human society are summed up in this verse. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn (as), and the tragic event of Ashurah occurred as a direct result of Imam Husayn's (as) murderers taking their desires as their god. Imam Husayn (as), while analysing the completion of humankind's intellect, speaks about following the right and avoiding the wrong, as the main condition for achieving perfection. He said:

> *The intellect does not achieve completion except by observance and following the right.*[26]

Thus it is a disease to follow its desire and demonic insinuation, and one will never be able to achieve perfection through doing it. When one sees the pervasiveness of this problem one may ask: Could God have created a world free from this disease, a perfect world? Of a surety Allah (swt) could do so, but the fact of the matter is that He did not!

This is a crucial question, and indeed Allah (swt) could have created a world without such an illness. But when we protest at the state of affairs that we see around us, and express our consequent dissatisfaction, we are, in fact, blaming Allah (swt) for the sins our own hands have wrought. It must be clear that this is in no way conflicting with the Justice of Allah (swt).

By looking at this problem, we see why the Shi'ah have emphasized Divine Justice in their theology, and why we have included it as a separate part of our *usul al-deen*. This is because

without Justice, nothing would exist, in accordance with the tradition of the Infallibles (as): 'If there was no justice, the heavens and Earth could not stand.' We have asked if God could create a better world, but this question is vague in and of itself. We must be specific as to *which* world we are speaking about, the natural world, or the world that is based on human decisions and actions. The natural world is without flaw. But the human world, and all of its conflicts, is the source of imbalance. One cannot produce an atom bomb, drop it on defenceless individuals, and then cry out against God for the 170,000 civilians killed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These are actions based on human choice. Without a doubt, God could have created a better world. What disrupts this world is a human will which creates injustice and oppression. Allah says in His Qur'an:

> *Allah does not oppress people, but people oppress themselves'*
> (Qur'an 16:118)

Looking at the events of Ashurah, we must see that we, as Muslims, are the authentic representatives of Justice. This is true even if we are oppressed, and even if we are killed. The Shi'ah have been slaughtered throughout history and throughout the world, yet this persecution has led them to spread throughout all parts of the world. Could Islam have spread into Pakistan, India, Southeast Asia, Malaysia, or Indonesia without those immigrants who were forced to take refuge in these places, places in which they eventually settled, and began to spread the word of Allah (swt)? Islam would never have spread to these places had Muslim immigrants not been forced into these new environments.

As many Muslims have made a similar decision to take refuge in the West, in order to flee oppression at home, so we must carry on this task that has been laid upon us, and spread Islam. We do not face the same oppression as did many of our forebearers. Those who lived in Iran, Pakistan, or India are familiar with the shrines of the Imamzadeh, the various descendents of the Imams (as). All of these Imamzadeh were persecuted to the point that no one even knew they were descendants of Prophet Muhammad (saws)'s family. Shah Abd al-Azeem, who is buried in Shahre Ray in the

southern part of Tehran, was the brother of an Imam (as), yet his identity remained hidden until after his death. We do not face such a situation. There is oppression, but we still have the ability to speak.

Can we compare that situation to the one of today? There is oppression, but we are free, and we can speak. It is our own weakness that prevents us from speaking. Bear in mind the words of Prophet Muhammad (saws), when he said of Imam Ali (as) as he was facing Amr in battle, 'The whole of faith is facing the whole of disbelief.' We must think, if we truly desire to be like Imam Ali (as), to be all of faith facing all of disbelief. We have to see if we want to be like Imam Husayn (as), standing firm in belief, and saying, 'This is the lantern of the path, the lantern of guidance, as Imam Husayn (as) is the lantern of the Path, and the ship of salvation.'

Freedom

> *O followers of the Abu Sufiyan family, if you do not have religion and you are not afraid of the Resurrection Day, then be free in your world.*[27]

These are the words of Imam Husayn (as), which have forced us to speak about a more universal side to his thoughts. His speech is about freedom and, as our book is about the martyr of freedom, we should pay special attention to this subject. Of course, the topic will not be approached philosophically; rather, in an objective and comprehensible way. We have read that Imam Husayn (as) addressed the soldiers of the enemy, urging them that they should, at least, behave freely in their worldly affairs and not to be slaves to others. This quotation shall lead us to discuss the topic of freedom from both an Islamic and a wider angle.

Freedom means literally to act according to the dictates of one's conscience without any hindrances or obstacles. Among the hindrances to freedom of action is one's fondness of pleasure and of things, the continued enjoyment of which is jeopardised by

following the dictates of one's conscience. Emancipation from desire defies all earthly power to enslave one. By acting according to the precepts of his conscience, Al-Husayn showed his freedom from desire, in circumstances of the most forbidding hardship. For Imam Husayn (as), I believe, freedom meant to be ready to sacrifice himself and to be killed, if he were deprived of his rights, honour, and dignity. He considered the Kufans as genuine slaves, despite being leaders and governors. The import that Al-Husayn's struggle gave to liberty is that the citizens of a free country are, in reality, slaves if they pursue evil objects, if they solely follow their desires. Conversely, the citizens of a free country, who consider themselves as servants solely to the Unique Lord, they and their country are really free, as long as they follow righteousness, and worship the One God (swt).[28]

Even the notion of being a servant of the Unique Lord is explained in Imam Husayn's (as) words in another way. He says:

> *A group worships Allah because of its true desire for reward of paradise; this is the service of traders. And a group worships Allah because of fear from hell and the torment of Allah (swt); this is the service of slaves, who obey their masters, being afraid of them. And a group worships Allah as thanksgiving; this is the service of free men and is the most superior service.'*[29]

We understand that Imam Husayn (as) did not consider even his relationship with his Lord as a humilated and worthless man serving a cruel and arrogant Lord. Rather he knew that it was an intimate and meaningful reciprocal love and respect from the human being, as the created being towards the Lord who is the Creator, and vice versa.

To discuss the idea of freedom in a wider context, let us quote some Western thinkers:

- The American author Albert Pike: 'The sovereignty of one's self over one's self is called liberty.'[30]

- The American psychologist William James: 'Only necessity understood, and bondage to the highest is identical with true freedom.' [31]

- The British clergyman Charles Kingsley: 'There are two freedoms- the false, where a man is free to do what he likes; the true, where he is free to do what he ought.'[32]

- Hartley Coldgridge (1796-1849), who was an English poet: 'But what is freedom? Rightly understood, it is a universal essence to be good.'[33]

What does it mean to be good? It means to act justly. What does it mean to be just? Being just is to keep a responsible freedom. Someone may claim that this is a circular definition that provides us no appropriate answer. Indeed one has to seek a profound understanding of freedom, rather than speaking of it in clusive concepts, which prevent it from being grasped in an accurate manner. Let us first observe it through the history of various nations where we will see how it played a significant role.

If we look back at the French Revolution, we see championed the cry of liberty. If you ask the Iranians about their uprising, they claimed, during their Islamic revolution, the goals of independence, liberty, and the Islamic Republic. We see then that freedom is a concept omnipresent in political discourse, and it is associated with social and ideological life. The slogan of 'Give me freedom or give me death' is a common theme, not just one pertaining to the American Revolution. None of this, however, helps to clarify the meaning of the concept of freedom.

Some may imagine that all religions, including Islam, stand opposed to freedom and that personal freedom - as an idea - first emerged in Europe. As such, it would be futile to discuss freedom and Islam together, or to try to link these two supposedly intractably opposed concepts. The idea that freedom and religion are fundamentally opposed has become prevalent in the world, and has its roots in the French Revolution. The fact is quite the contrary. Islam expressed the ideas of freedom centuries before

Europe. Islam has always argued for freedom: freedom from lust and desires, as well as from material and physical constraints. This dual approach is entirely unique to Islam. The freedom advocated during the French Revolution was a petty and worthless freedom, especially compared to the freedom advocated by Divine schools of thought. Indeed, converts are now embracing Islam of their own will and their own completed wish.

Did Imam Husayn (as) have anything to teach us about freedom? We have seen two incidents on the day of Ashurah where Imam Husayn (as) offered us the correct definition of freedom. The first example involved one of Imam Husayn's (as) companions, a black man named John. He was subjected to racial abuse, but he stood with Imam Husayn (as) against Yazid. John had been captured during a war with the polytheists, and had been sold as a slave to Abu Dharr al-Ghuffari, the great companion who stood against the third *Caliph* and criticized him for his economic and social injustice. This John was a *maula* of Abu Dharr, meaning that he had been bought by Abu Dharr and then set free, maintaining a close relationship with him. How did this ex-slave understand the meaning of freedom? After he became a free man at the hands of Abu Dharr, he chose to become one of his companions. John knew, from the teaching of Abu Dharr, the greatness of Imam Husayn (as).

John was aware of the opposition Imam Husayn (as) faced and came to the Imam (as), telling him that he yearned to be killed for his cause. This was a man who knew what slavery was, and knew that, if he accepted the authority of Yazid, he would once again become a slave, but this time in a different way. As such, he decided it was better to fight, and, if necessary, to die. He also said that if his blood and origins stem from a despised origin, then to let his blood be shed along with Imam Husayn (as) would be an honour. Imam Husayn (as) prayed that he would be blessed that his face would remain bright, and that a sweet perfume would emanate from his body.[34] After the martyrdom of John and after his blood had been spilt, the sweetest perfume was witnessed permeating from his savaged body.

Another example of freedom can be found in the person of Hurr bin Yazid Ar-Riyahi. Hurr was responsible for bringing Imam Husayn (as) to Karbalah and securing him in a place that disallowed him access to water. After Imam Husayn (as) had finished praying the *fajr* prayer on the 9th of Muharram, he began preaching to the enemy. He demanded to know why they were so intent on killing him and his family, even though he had done nothing to them. At last, he said, 'If you do not want us to enter Kufah, allow us to go wherever we want to go.' He was refused, and told that he had no choice but to either submit and accept Yazid's authority, or die. Death held no threat to Imam Husayn (as), as there was no other way.

Nonetheless, one individual in Yazid's army understood the message of these words, and this was Hurr. He reflected upon the situation, and was influenced by Imam Husayn's (as) words. He knew what kind of man Imam Husayn (as) was, and knew that he had committed no crime. He reflected, and it is this kind of reflection that is commanded in Islam. It is said, in the traditions that one hour of contemplation is better than a year's worth of (*'ibadat*) worship.

We see then, that after only a few minutes of thought and reflection, Hurr came to a decision that changed his destiny from a path of evil to a path of good. As he seemed to be faltering, his companions asked what was wrong with one of the bravest and most renowned of soldiers. He replied:

> *I am choosing whether or not to be in hell or in heaven...Never will I accept hell.*[35]

He then defected to the camp of the Imam (as). Imam Husayn (as), knowing that something was brewing in Hurr's heart, sent Abbas (as) to collect him. Hurr went to Imam Husayn (as) and begged for forgiveness, confessing that it was he who had brought him to this place. He begged to know if his repentance could be accepted, and Imam Husayn (as) answered in the affirmative. Hurr then asked if he could speak to his soldiers, tell them of his decision, and explain to them what it meant to be free. Imam Husayn (as)

granted him permission, however Hurr proceeded with no success. Hurr fought on the day of Ashurah, gave his life and was martyred.

We point out that in Arabic the word 'Hurr' itself, means 'free'. Imam Husayn (as) wept over his body, and said:

> *You are a free man; as your mother has decided to call you free, as you are a free man in this world and the hereafter.*[36]

These two men are dear examples to us, dear examples of freedom in Islam.

Observing the case from another angle, one may think that there are natural laws controlling history, therefore that one cannot be free. A number of European scholars are of the opinion that to maintain the notion of human freedom how we understand the workings of history should be kept outside the purview of universal laws, and it should be maintained that no special laws are applicable to the field of history. This, they say, is necessary to promote man's free choice in respect of his activities.[37]

However, although one should admit that there are institutions that rule history, one has to work and function dynamically within the framework of these institutions. Two thinkers, one ancient, and one from the modern era, have both admitted this fact:

- Horace said: 'Who then is free? The one who wisely is lord of himself, who neither poverty, death, nor captivity terrify, who is strong to resist his appetites and shun honours, and is complete in himself, smooth and round like a globe.'[38]

- William C. Clegg said:

> *Freedom knows this that every man is free to choose his life*
> *and what he'll be.*
> *For this eternal truth is given, God will force no man to*
> *heaven.*
> *He'll call;*

Persuade;
Direct aright;
Bless with wisdom, love and light; in nameless ways be good
and kind, but never force the human mind.[39]

Thus one has to work within the provided opportunities and the institutions that are ruling over the human society. The Muslim scholars have made it clear that only those who have been able to save themselves first can save other human beings. Allah (swt) addresses Prophet Muhammad (saws) in the Qur'an:

So maybe you will worry yourself with grief for them, if they believe not in this revelation. (Qur'an 18-6)

The Prophet (saws) had such concern for the guidance, prosperity, and salvation of humankind that he tended to sacrifice himself for the purpose.[40] A free and perfect man or woman is one who is eager to save fellow humans, while at the same time is following the same rules that apply to daily life. Thus the state of tranquillity or salvation is to attain the truth. And the truth means to accept reality - as it is - and to struggle to improve it, while complying with these rules.

Restrictions of Personal Freedom under Islam

'Only law can give us freedom.[41]

That is how Johann Wolfgang Goethe expressed himself about freedom; it should be perceived within the framework of Law, not beyond it. History has also contributed to help us understand freedom in a rational way. Edith Hamilton, an American classical scholar, says:

When the freedom they wished for most was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free and was never free again.[42]

Thus our notion of freedom is backed by a universal support that perceives freedom in a parallel way, with only slight differences, to the Islamic concept. What then does it mean to be free in Islam? Is there a contradiction between submitting to Islamic law and being a free individual? No. We see that Islam assigns no ethical value to religious acts committed under duress. Someone who prays because he is forced to earns no value from his prayer. There is no ethical value to actions done outside of the context of freedom.

We are living in modern societies, and are 'free' to do whatever we want. Yet, as devoted Muslims, we choose to follow Islamic law. This is a dear lesson to us as well. The women who choose to wear *hijab* and challenge society are exemplars of human freedom. Freedom means to become a perfect human being, not to do whatever one desires. It means to enter into Islam with a free and rational choice. We will say then that we are Muslims, and that we are proud to be free men and women; this is what we see embodied in the mission and martyrdom of Imam Husayn (as).

Practicing Islam in our daily life is a challenge, but almost all those who have experienced it, describe it as exciting, a time of real personal and spiritual growth, and a time of intensified feelings. For some of those who view the teachings of Islam superficially, they may seem complicated and difficult to hold in a materialistic world such as our own. However, by looking deeply into the goals and ideology of Islam, various facts will be revealed, and comparing them with Western thinkers' ideas many points will be uncovered.

Nowadays, the concept of freedom is blurred with so many thoughts and ideologies that it is impossible to find a clear definition for it. In some societies freedom is viewed in an absolute manner, one that leaves no space for moral values and/or individual responsibility. According to this view, a civilized and free woman, for instance, should have the right to appear half naked in public. In reality, no real freedom is created or practiced by this behaviour; all that has happened is that personal desires, lusts, and whims have been obeyed. The price paid for this 'freedom' is the destruction of the moral psyche of society at

large. This deification of absolute personal freedom is obviously absurd. No one would deny that if an automobile driver was given absolute freedom on the road he would not only risk his own life, but the lives of all others who are sharing the road with him. Such recklessness is obviously not 'freedom' in any real sense. True freedom is freedom of mind and liberation from the cage of self-desires. This is the special kind of freedom offered by Islam. It is freedom -combined with responsibility- that guarantees true happiness for individuals and society. True freedom is the freedom of the mind, which bases itself on justice. Absolute freedom is never a synonym for happiness, however much some primitive minds may believe this. Thus, a truly obedient and responsible person is the best example of a free individual. As the American preacher Henry W. Beecher said:

> *True obedience is true freedom.*[43]

Also, one can refer to the notion with which we began discussion of the previous topic, while considering the details of perfection as being relevant to promote a responsible freedom rather than an irresponsible one. The American author Leo Buscaglia has said:

> *If we wish to free ourselves from enslavement, we must choose freedom and the responsibility this entails.*[44]

There are many good examples of this responsible form of freedom, like the tendency towards religious practice in the Western world. Another modern phenomenon is the embracing of the Islamic faith. People and groups are using their free will in choosing to become Muslims by their own volition. They choose to embrace Islam in these Western countries, even though they are more than free to wallow in apathy or to remain non-religious. In this context, we recollect the example of Moses who revolted against Pharaoh, despite having being brought up in his palace.

Pharaoh said to Moses, 'You are the man who grew up in our house and at our table and when you grew up you committed the crime of killing a man.' But Moses answered, 'Should I remain

silent at your enslavement of my people solely because I have grown up in your house? I have come to save these slaves.'

We know that one of the aims of prophets is to establish social freedom and fight against every form of enslavement and social deprivation. We also know that both social liberty and spiritual freedom are sacred and the former is not possible without the latter. The trouble with modern society is that it tries to safeguard social liberty without seeking spiritual freedom. There are concepts, usually based on Eastern philosophy, which should be promoted regarding freedom. Sri Madhava says:

> *Freedom, then, lies only in our innate human capacity to choose between different sorts of bondage; bondage to desire or self-esteem, or bondage to the light that lightens all our lives.*[45]

In order to promote another approach to freedom, one established by some great Western thinkers, Goethe said:

> *Freedom consists not in refusing to recognise anything above us, but in respecting something which is above us; for, by respecting it, we raise ourselves to it, and, by our very acknowledgement, prove that we bear within ourselves what is higher, and are worthy to be on a level with it.*[46]

Conversely, we see throughout history how Christian states, during the Middle Ages, often gave Muslims a choice between death and conversion to Christianity. Probably the most notorious example of this phenomenon of forced conversion was during the Christian conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Even though the Christians had become sufficiently powerful and sophisticated to defeat the Muslims throughout the peninsula, Spain continued to face a complex problem even after conquest. Like the Jesuits in Elizabethan England, *Moriscos* (converted Muslims) and *Marranos* (converted Jews) in Spain were seen as both religious and political threats. Not only were they suspected of being closet infidels, but they were also accused of complicity with the Muslim powers. If

the conditions of one's life change such that one is put in such severe circumstances, one would prefer to be martyred than spend a whole life in total and utter humiliation. Imam Husayn (as) said in this regard:

> *I do not see (consider) death except prosperity and do not consider life with oppressors and tyrants as anything except affliction and anguish.*[47]

If one is willing to die for the sake of being devoted to his faith, one will never be defeated. Let us quote from Jawaharlal Nehru saying:

> *Those who are prepared to die for any cause are seldom defeated.*[48]

If we want to be real Shi'ah, we have to cry for Imam Husayn's problems, and not our own. If we cry for him that day in the light of our own problems, we can see and appreciate the harsh reality of his problems and the greatness of his character.

In conclusion, we are free, despite being committed to follow the Divine Islamic beliefs and practices (*Shari'ah*), which were established for the good of individuals and society. Many believe that all religions – including Islam – stand opposed to freedom and dignity. It is argued that social, personal, and human freedom first emerged in Europe, and that it would be futile to try to unite freedom and Islam. They maintain that Islam (and all other forms of religion) has nothing to do with freedom, and that this socio-political idea of 'freedom' that has become prevalent in the world is a European and Western invention (stemming from the French Revolution) that cannot be reconciled with an Oriental religion such as Islam. The reality is quite the opposite. Freedom was expressed in Islam centuries before the intellectuals, thinkers, and revolutionaries of Europe made human freedom one of the principal human rights.

Freedom, in its most sublime and divine form, means the liberation of the human spirit from contamination, lusts, and desires, and its malevolent dependence on material constraints. This understanding of freedom remains the exclusive domain of divine theologies, and secular ideologies have never been able to comprehend or accept it. The freedom advocated in the French Revolution, which has ever since been advocated throughout the entire Western world, was a petty, limited, and worthless freedom, compared to the freedom advocated by the divine schools of thought.

In addition, we need to be able to use the event of Karbalah as a means to find common ground when discussing with non-Muslims and even Sunni Muslims. The majority of Sunni Muslims do not even know about Karbalah and its great lessons regarding freedom, let alone the tragic details.

The message we have to convey to all is the universal message of Imam Husayn's (as) revolution, which was the understanding and correct definition of freedom. Non-Muslims would agree with us regarding the need to stand against oppression. We have been created free, and if we want to live freely we must not become slaves to others. These are the universal messages of Imam Husayn's (as) revolution; messages that we can all benefit from and use to help us to strive towards global unity.

Imam Husayn's (as) Universal Slogans

The events that took place on the day of Ashurah, sixty-one years after Hijra, are events that have been engraved upon the hearts and minds of the Shi'ah. Every year Shi'ah recount the tragedy, the suffering and the significance of Imam Husayn's (as) martyrdom and shed tears for the pain that he and his family endured at the hands of oppressors. But, if you were to mention the name 'Imam Husayn' to non-Muslims, how many would know who he was? Mention to them the names of thinkers and intellectuals such as Marx, Buddha, or Martin Luther King, Jr., and they might well respond - for the deeds and sayings of these people are recorded as

proverbs the world over. But why, then, would the name 'Al-Husayn' illicit such a dumbfounded response?

It is most unfortunate that we, the followers of Imam Husayn, have traditionally presented him in a very limited fashion. As a result, even our own Muslim brothers and sisters remain ignorant of what really happened on that terrible day in 61 A.H., and of who Imam Husayn was! It must be made clear from the beginning that dispelling such ignorance is our own responsibility; Imam Husayn was a great man, an inspiring leader, and a revolutionary thinker - certainly someone who deserves to be remembered. When he spoke, he spoke to all humanity. Let us begin by looking at how he spoke, as narrated by some historical books.

Imam Husayn and Universal Values

> *'I have not stood up in the form of provocation or arrogance, nor as to create cause. Indeed I have stood up wishing only for the salvation of my Grandfather's religion. And so I want to order the good deed and forbid the evil and put into practice the morals of my Grandfather, Muhammad (saws), and my father Ali ibn Abu Talib (as).'*[49]

Obviously, this statement is addressed exclusively to Muslims, because he is speaking about 'enjoining good and forbidding evil' in order to revive the Islamic way of life. However if we were to mention this to non-Muslim people in the West, many probably would not see a problem with the moral values against which Al-Husayn was protesting: which was the drunkenness and adulterous personality of Yazid. Whilst having strong Islamic significance, this is a universally fundamental and essential issue that must be considered by all. We must certainly seek a more dynamic and engaging method of carrying the message of Al-Husayn to non-Muslims, i.e., all of humanity. Imam Husayn (as) was a man of dignity who represented such high moral values, and there are other aspects of him which we may speak about to everyone! For example, he said in his sermon:

> *I do not consider death but prosperity and I do not consider life under oppressors but humiliation.*[50]

This political slogan obviously represents a universal educational statement. Imam Husayn (as), like any other human being, considers accepting oppression, living under discrimination and injustice to be a humiliating and dehumanizing way of living. And he also considers a noble death to be a preferable alternative to such a degrading alternative. Also, before the battle began, Imam Husayn (as) addressed the army of 'Umar ibn Sa'ad:

> *O people, hear me, I will not hasten to you in war until I preach to you. It is an obligation that must be performed, and it is your right over me that I tell you this. If you think it is just and fair, then you will be happy, and if you are not, then resign from justice and fairness and make war.*[51]

Here Imam Husayn (as) pleads with the army to listen to reason and fairness. Who can reject such an offer? He first wonders why and what reason has justified them to kill him? He identifies himself as the son of Fatimah al-Zahra (as), from the household of the Prophet (saws), and asks what has given them cause to kill him.

After it became clear that the army would not allow Imam Husayn (as) to leave, the Imam approached his followers and said to them:

> *He [Yazid] has given us only two alternatives. Either we will accept the authority of Yazid and be humiliated, or we will be killed. We and disgrace, how preposterous! This humiliation is rejected by Allah, by his Prophet and all believers would reject it also. Those chaste women who raised us in Islam and taught us the Islamic way of life would never accept humiliation!*[52]

This represents the universal dimension of Imam Husayn's sermon. What human being would accept humiliation? No one. Even one thousand four hundred years later, this message is alive

and relevant for all humankind. Give this to any rational human being today, and they will accept it because it represents a universal value accepted by all good human beings!

> *O followers of Abu Sufyan's family, if you are not religious at all, if you do not fear Allah and the day of judgement, then at least be free in your life and do not be slaves of tyranny!*[53]

The soldiers in the army of 'Umar ibn Sa'ad had been paid by Yazid[54], influenced by his propaganda, and forced to fight under coercion. Most of them had no idea who they were really fighting. Imam Husayn was asking the soldiers the reason why they were fighting against him.[55] Even if they did not believe in Islam, did they want to be the slaves of a tyrant? Once again, freedom is a universal value. It is, also, one of the values we as Muslims must use to propagate the truth and cultivate a positive attitude for Islam.

We may all consider ourselves to be Muslims, but do we understand the nature and essence of Islam, which is the universal call for monotheism and the true realization of human beings to witness the Almighty presence with each and every part of their human body?

> *And I witness, my God, by the truth of my faith,*
> *The knotted resolutions of my certainty,*
> *My pure and unadulterated profession of Unity,*
> *The hidden inwardness of my consciousness,*
> *The places to which the streams of light of my eyes are attached,*
> *The lines on my forehead's surface,*
> *The openings for my breath's channels,*
> *The parts of my nose's soft point,*
> *The paths of my ears' canals,*
> *What my lips close upon and compress,*
> *The movements of my tongue in speaking,*
> *The joint at the back of my mouth and jaw,*
> *The sockets of my molar teeth,*
> *The place where I swallow my food and drink,*

That which bears my brain,
The hollow passages of my neck's fibres,
That which is contained in my breast's cavity,
The carriers of my aorta,
The places where my heart's curtain is attached,
The small pieces of flesh around my liver,
That which the ribs of my sides encompass,
The sockets of my joints,
The contraction of my members,
The tips of my fingers,
My flesh,
My blood,
My hair,
My skin,
My nerves,
My windpipe,
My bones,
My brain,
My veins,
And all of my members,
What was knitted upon them in the days when I was a suckling baby,
What the earth has taken away from me,
My sleep,
My waking,
My being still,
And the movements of my bowing and prostrating,
That had I taken pains and had I striven
For the duration of the epochs and ages
Were my life to be extended through them
To deliver thanks for one of Thy blessings,
I would not have been able to do so,
Except by Thy grace, which alone makes incumbent
Upon me never-ending and ever- renewed
Gratitude to Thee,
And fresh and ever-present praise.[56]

Imam Husayn spoke about God in an intelligent and eloquent manner; no rational person would reject this phenomenon of witnessing Almighty God! When he mentioned the parts of his body, all human beings can relate to it. Like the rest of his message, this was not restricted to one race or people, but rather open to everyone. His teachings regarding the struggle for freedom and justice against oppression and tyranny would be accepted by any rational person. And these are the teachings that we must actively seek to disseminate in the whole world. Also, these sentences of this supplication reveal his sense of love for the Divinity. This love is associated with his sense for performing his duties. This topic should be studied in the following paragraphs.

Duty and Love

The concept of duty and the necessity of performing one's duty is the next lesson we aim to discuss. Many see duty or an obligation as a limitation to individual freedom. However, in our philosophical arguments - especially in our ethics and the discussions on the correct understanding of individaul freedom - we have explained that being free is best manifested by perfoming one's duties, and commiting oneself to a responsible freedom. Yet this does not mean that the concept of duty is not important; rather it is put in a more rational context. Abraham Lincoln said:

> *Freedom is not the right to do what we want, but what we ought. Let us have faith that makes might and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it.*[57]

Indeed, doing one's duty frees the responsible individual from the feeling of guilt. There is therefore a feeling of guilt if a person is commiting a crime or letting someone down. Thus the inner consciousness is enough of a judge for moral living. The American writer Mark Twain said:

> *Duties are not performed for duty's sake, but because their neglect would make the man uncomfortable. A man performs*

> *but one duty - the duty of contenting his spirit, the duty of making himself agreeable to himself.*[58]

Were the Atomic Bombardments of the Japanese Cities a Duty?

What happened after the bombardment of Japan was unbelievable, unearthly, and, for most of us today, unimaginable. This statement is based on official health and statistical reports analyzing the event:

> *In a microsecond, huge stone pillars were rammed deep into the ground. For those distant enough not to be vaporized by the 50 million degree core temperature, eyes were liquefied, pouring out of sockets; clothing was fused to skin, which hung in runny tatters and shreds. Trapped people were burning alive and many were covered from head to foot, stuck with splintered glass which the shock wave fired like a whirlwind of needle-shaped bullets through the air. Others, blinded by the flash, staggered into jagged debris. Children cried and whimpered, completely lost. Others wandered like a funeral procession of the living dead, while the mushroom cloud overhead blotted out the sun and brought on night. Only 180 of 200 doctors in Hiroshima were killed. Only 130 nurses were left from 1,800. Three of 55 hospitals were all that remained, and 70,000 water-main breaks hampered the few remaining (16) fire trucks.*

It should be pointed out that a cruise missile will carry fifteen times the power of the Hiroshima death. Let us examine the story of the American pilots who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima; pilots who definitely claim that they had only 'done what was their duty'. This is the kind of justification offered after the inhumane bombardments of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where 170,000 innocent people were massacred. Such a statement is the justification given by those who committed such a horrendous crime, which resulted in huge condemnation, as a result of guilt. Some of them may have been driven insane by such strong guilty

emotions. We shall now read more statements of the involved individuals:

> *I have become death, the destroyer of worlds.*

This is what Robert Oppenheimer, Father of the Atomic Bomb, had to say after the few words of co-pilot Robert Lewis, who said he could taste atomic fission; and it tasted like lead. Then he, i.e. the pilot, turned away to write in his journal.

> *'My God,' he asked himself, 'what have we done?'* [59]

Fifty-six years later, Capt. Lewis' second thoughts are shared by many Americans today. Many Americans, and certainly most Japanese, and all human beings, look at the decision to drop the bomb only in moral terms, and ask the question if it was right to flatten two entire cities. However, to the men who made that decision in the summer of 1945, morality was only one factor, and not the most important factor, at that!

There were many involved in the decision of implementing the A-bombs. One of them was Mc Cloy. The American president Harry Truman asked him what he had in mind to reach a quick surrender of the Japanese. Mc Cloy offered his ideas for obtaining surrender by diplomatic methods:

> *Some communication to the Japanese government which would spell out the terms that we would settle for - there would be a surrender: I wouldn't use again the term 'unconditional surrender', but it would be a surrender that would mean we would get all the important things we were fighting for... if we could accomplish our objectives without further bloodshed, there was no reason why we shouldn't attempt to do it...*[60]

Mc Cloy proposed that the U.S. remind Japan of its great military superiority, and that the Americans would:

> *...permit Japan to continue to exist as a nation..., that we would permit them to choose their own form of government, including the retention of the Mikado, but only on the basis of a constitutional monarchy...*[61]

Then Mc Cloy dropped an even bigger bombshell:

> *I had raised the question whether we ought not to tell them that we had the bomb and that we would drop the bomb. Well, as soon as I mentioned the word 'bomb', the atomic bomb, even in that select circle... it was sort of a shock. You didn't mention the bomb out loud... Well, there was a sort of a [gasp] back at that.*[62]

Mc Cloy later wrote:

> *Everyone was so intent on winning the war by military means that the introduction of political considerations was almost accidental.*[63]

To the end of his life, Mc Cloy felt:

> *We missed the opportunity of effecting a Japanese surrender, completely satisfactory to us, without the necessity of dropping the bombs."The use of nuclear weapons on Japan was not given the thoroughness of consideration and the depth of thought that the president of the United States was entitled to have before a decision of this importance was taken.*[64]

Does the concept of duty really entitle someone to commit this kind of inhumane act? Can similar arguments be used to justify the crimes of someone like Yazid and Saddam Husayn, or the soldiers who carry out their actions? Can they say that they are merely 'doing their duty'?

Our lives as Muslims, as well as those of all human beings, are based on our sense of duty. When a Muslim woman is asked 'Why do you wear a headscarf and not eat pork?', and so forth, she might reply that she is merely doing her duty. She could attempt to offer reasons, explaining that pork is not clean and so on. But these reasons are often not satisfactory, since it might be possible to clean pork and remove the diseases that are inherent in it. Scientifically, it is difficult to prove, to a stubborn individual that pork is so harmful that one should never consume it, purely from the perspective of health. The links between pork and bodily disease are much weaker than the links proven between smoking and bodily diseases, yet smoking is *halal*, according to many scholars of Islam, and pork is unanimously *haraam*. Instead of offering reasons, all we can truly say is that we are doing our duty by following Islamic Divine laws. We cannot devote our lives to always finding the philosophy underlying Islamic Divine laws. No doubt a philosophy underlying every Islamic law exists, but this does not mean that such a philosophy and cause is always available to us and ready at hand.

Allah is the All-Wise. We need to accept the fact that the rulings He gives are based on Wisdom. If pork is ruled to be *haraam* by Allah the Exalted, then it is. If we truly believe that He is the All-Wise, we should not have any doubts about whether pork is *haraam*. *Shariah Law* is a complete system; sometimes our knowledge is limited and insufficient to understand the reasons underlying every legislation. As Muslims, we are obliged to carry out our duty, even if we fail to understand the underlying reasons for a Divine Decree. This is the natural result of our belief that Allah (swt)'s Knowledge encompasses everything.

People often confuse the rulings and legislations that come from Allah (swt) with the rulings and legislation that have nothing to do with Divine Justice. The same cause can apply to *duty*. If you were to have asked the people of Kufah why they abandoned Imam Husayn (as) and fought against him, they would have claimed that they were only doing their duty, and following the orders of the 'governor Ibn Ziyad'. They may even have claimed great honour for themselves. Similarly, we see that the bomber

pilots who destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki are held up as heroes for doing their duty.

All these were the result of a failure to distinguish between an unjustified order and a justified Divine Law. Within this framework a Muslim must try to act and perform his duty, as she/he should only think about the Almighty's content. If what has been put for him as a duty is based on injustice, so she/he should not perform it, knowing that Allah's (swt) will is the final goal, and nothing should prevent anyone from achieving such a goal. Imam Husayn (as) stated that, if someone attempts to please people instead of pleasing his Lord, Almighty Lord will leave him to the people to both reward or judge him. He said in this regard:

> *One who seeks the pleasure of people by displeasing Allah, Allah (swt) will leave him over to the people's judgment.*[65]

Sometimes the duty of one person cannot be fulfilled, or is even ineffective unless it is combined with the duties and performance of others; as though if they did not follow in the same footsteps the whole project would fail. Imam Husayn (as), the Master of Martyrs, his disciples, and his household all taught us our duty; sacrifice on the battle ground, propagation when away from the arena. The sermons and exhortations of Imam Sajjad (as), and Her Holiness Zaynab (as) were as effective in advancing the cause of Islam as was the sacrifice made by Imam Husayn (as) and are equivalent to it in the eyes of Allah (swt). They taught us that neither men nor women should be afraid to oppose tyrannical rule. Her Holiness Zaynab (as) got up before Caliph Yazid, spoke out and belittled him in such a way that the Umayyad dynasty had never before experienced. The speeches they made (as captives) on the way to Kufah and Syria, and the sermon Imam Sajjad delivered, made it quite clear that the issue was not opposition of the unjust to the just. The supporters of Yazid had wanted to portray Imam Husayn (as) as a man who was against the established government of the day, that he opposed the caliph of God's Messenger (saws). Imam Sajjad (as) revealed this point in the presence of a crowd, and so did Her Holiness Zaynab (as). And the Master of the Masters has specified our duty - do not fear your

inadequacy in regard to men when you are at a battleground, do not fear martyrdom. A man must tolerate hardships proportionate to the greatness of his aim and idea.[66]

Also, the concept of love is often intermixed with the concept of duty. People may understand their feelings for others as the result of a concept of duty. One has a duty to someone, so they grow to love that person. But there are others who are the opposite. They do their duty because of love. Both ways are acceptable, but nonetheless Allah (swt) asks us to do our duty through love, rather than understand love through duty. However, there appears to be a contradiction if one loves someone or some thing, then feels a duty to do something which would contradict that love. A perfect example of this is the man from Kufah who was amongst the people involved in the looting after the battle in Ashurah. The historical record says that he came to a tent and was looting the jewellery of Imam Husayn's daughter. He wanted to take a piece of her jewellery while he was crying! She asked him why he was crying. He replied that what he was doing was shameful - looting from the family of the Prophet (saws), adding that he loved them. She replied 'Leave it, then!' He responded, 'I'm afraid (if I don't take it) somebody *else* will take it!'[67]

Thus, although he wanted to claim that he loved the Prophet (saws) and his family, he felt it was his duty to commit that inhumane act, as he was a thief, and thieves cannot usually see others looting, while they are not joining in!

In this case we face two contradictory matters; a claim of love, and an act based on duty. He expressed his love through the tears he cried when he felt guilty, as his victims were members of the Prophet's (saws) family. Whilst he claimed that he loved the Prophet (saws) and his family, his actions spoke louder than his words. He justified his act by stating that the jewellery would be taken anyway, so therefore let it rather be done by him, and this was, so to say, his sense of duty!

Looking at such a case, one cannot believe in such a claim of love, while observing the act, which was done out of a sense of *duty*. It is

undoubtedly clear that this form of love is nothing but hypocrisy and cheating, and, if there was a duty, it was solely due to the greedy nature of those people. If he really loved the holy family, he would have struggled on their side, and could never have satisfied himself with less than being killed in their army. Also, such a claim of duty is in itself a contradictory one, because no one who claims to love the Prophet (saws) and his household can ever justify or believe in such an inhumane act. We have seen how this holy family revealed this hypocrisy when they entered Kufah. Zaynab addressed them while they were crying, asking who, then, has killed us? She also said:

> *O people of Kufah! Community of deceit and fraud deprived of pride and honour! May your eyes never be dried of tears, and your cries never fall silent! You are like that woman who undoes the thread that she has spun after it has become strong; you have made your solemn oaths a pretext for your corruption and annihilation. What do you possess except boasting, egotism, antagonism, and falsehood? And you are like female servants who are busied in faltering and slander? And like the green weeds, which grow over animal excrement, or like the silver, which is used for decorating the graves - having beautiful and appealing appearance, but possessing an ugly and undesirable inner self! What sort of bad provisions you have collected and sent in advance for your hereafter in order to ignite the Divine wrath, thus inviting His eternal punishment on yourselves! Do you (who disregard your solemn oaths and have broken your commitments) cry over my brother Al-Husayn? Do cry because you deserve it; cry a lot and laugh but little!* [68]

Imam Ali ibn Al-Husayn (as) delivered a speech in his weak and tremulous voice, and told the people:

> *It is you who have shed our blood, and now your women shed tears over your misfortune! God will decide between you and us.*[69]

The Relationship between Love and Duty

In looking at the relationship between love and duty, one may pray because it is a duty, and as a result of fulfilling that duty become filled with love for Allah (swt). But at other times one will pray as a direct result of that love, as love has reached its height and one performs one's duty because of one's devotion. According to our narrations this is the best way of understanding and performing one's duties. It is best that one fulfills one's duty because of love rather than because one is forced to do so; and to be willing to pray and worship Allah (swt), even if it were not incumbent upon us.

Most, however, will always resort to the first way, of doing one's duty before developing any sense of love. But if you abandon this and move to the next level, there is no doubt that you will feel the difference. We find in the *salat* that we are required to recite the Qur'an in its perfect Arabic. But in the time of *qunut*, there is no requirement for language or any thing. One only has to speak from the heart.

This love was manifested in Imam Husayn (as). It was this love that impelled him, even though he told others that his revolution was the result of a duty that was imposed upon him. In reality, this duty was followed because of love. Those who have no love for worshipping Allah (swt) want to worship him as quickly as possible and be done with it. But we see the opposite in Imam Husayn (as), and the way he prayed and worshipped Allah (swt). Even though he (as) spoke of duty, a closer examination will reveal the love was overwhelming in his heart.

Before we discuss this, let us read the words of the English novelist George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1880), who says:

> *She stirred somewhat beyond her want, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often, as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men – the words GOD, Immortality, and Duty – pronounced with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and*

> *yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accounts affirmed the sovereignity of the impersonal and unrecompensing Law.*[70]

The three words that the author ranks as the most high are God, Immortality, and Duty. It is impossible, she says, to understand Allah (swt) and so difficult to believe in immortality. But, nonetheless, the concept of duty is absolute and supreme over everything else. There may seem to be some sort of dialectic between duty and love. Love must temper duty, in order that we may be appropriately flexible in our duty. We should not pursue duty to ends that were never intended for this concept, as with the pilots bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When Imam Husayn (as) sacrificed himself, his whole family, and everything he had, we see that he was, nonetheless, feeling sad for those who were fighting him, those who were going to enter Hell on his account. He did not feel hatred towards them in a sense that we would understand, and he hoped that they would be able to return from this vile act and be able to enter Paradise. We see the hours that Imam Husayn (as) spent dealing with the enemy before the battle, trying to explain the evil nature of their acts to them, and to turn them away from what they were about to commit. He was looking for their salvation, and was hoping to help them. A noble man, a true Muslim, must always combine duty with love in this way. If one cannot deny the magic effects of love, one will certainly detect the huge effects of duty. Thus one could say, as the German poet Goethe said, 'Love can do much, but duty more.'

On the other hand, love can also be a vital factor in creating a peaceful or a dangerous environment. To love Almighty God (as) and His Mercy is in itself a wonderful opportunity to feel the duty of creating peace and harmony between human beings. However, love of this worldly life can also be dangerous, and therefore our spiritual guides have instructed us how to control this love, and how to bring it into balance. They told us to remember death as the termination of each and every single human being. The holy imams have told us to remember death in our daily interactions and transactions. That is the best cure for love of this world's satanic seductions. We know well that all men have to die, but we

think that death is meant only for others, not for us. To exterminate love of this world from our hearts we should always keep the concept of death before our eyes.[71]

One may claim that he is able to love his Lord very much and desires to establish a decent life, but at the same time does not see any problem of being possessed by this worldly life and the love for its material seductions, but they cannot both be possible in one heart. One can either love Allah or love this world. But both types of love cannot be contained in one heart.[72] And if this love is overwhelming and leaves no space for another love, then everything will be ready to be sacrificed. It will be even considered a duty. The Master of Martyrs deemed it his duty to oppose this power and be killed so that conditions would be stirred up by his sacrifice and the sacrifice of those in his company, in order for the oppressive power to be exposed and publicly disgraced. He recognised that an oppressive power had dominated the destiny of his country, and that his divine duty was to oppose and decry it, at any price, although it was clear -by known rules- that such a small number (Imam Husayn and his men) could not stand against such large numbers; yet he realised it as his divine duty.[73]

And in becoming a martyr absolute love becomes manifested, whereupon the latter becomes a must or a *duty*. There will be no limit to the horizon, as the French thinker and writer Ernest Renan said:

> *As soon as sacrifice becomes a duty and necessity to humankind, I see no limit to the horizon which opens before him.*[74]

Indeed, we believe that it became an obligation for Imam Husayn (as) to save Islam, and, realising that there were no limits to his sacrifice, he, therefore, decided to go for the ultimate sacrifice, and included everyone in his family, even the small boy who was only a few months old, who was later slaughtered by the enemy's arrow. Imam Husayn (as) is the perfect example of the Divine Master who taught humanity a lesson of love and fulfilling duty as no one else had ever done.

Some, while facing severe circumstances, may complain about being the victims of such a hard experience, or they may question whether it is really their duty. However, one must remember that we are in no way above the Master of Martyrs. He performed his duty and was killed, without hesitation over any of his duties.

Martyrdom

> *'Over each and every charity there is a charity, until a man is killed as a martyr, for this is the highest charity where there is no charity superior to it.*[75]
>
> *For all have not the gift of martyrdom.*[76]

These words from the Prophet Muhammad (saws) and the British poet, dramatist, and critic John Dryden (A.D. 1631-1700), should lead us to discuss the core message of Al-Husayn's (as) revolution, as he is named the Master of Martyrs. It is necessary to understand this Islamic concept in the light of Imam Husayn's (as) position and his sacrifice.

Martyrdom (*Shahadah*) is the term used in Arabic when referring to this phenomenon. It is derived from the root *sh-ha-da*, which means 'to witness', and the primary meaning of this word ('to witness') is therefore often used throughout the Qur'an. However, the predominant usage of the same word in the traditions refers to a sacrifice that seals the end of a believer's life, whilst he is fighting against injustice and infidelity. The martyr is usually rewarded with the highest rank in Paradise.

Martyrdom plays a special role in Islamic teaching, especially amongst the Shi'ah; and Imam Husayn (as) is considered as the Master of Martyrs; i.e., martyr par excellence.[77]

Within Christian literature, martyrdom originally referred to a legal 'witness', which is the original Greek meaning. The word 'martyr' then evolved in Christian terminology to refer to anyone

who died for his or her Christian beliefs, following on from St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who was stoned to death in Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 35). Martyrs were ranked above all other saints, venerated for their courage and faith, and were considered to be powerful intercessors between the faithful and God. The graves of martyrs were turned into shrines.

Tertullian (A.D. 160-240), a Roman Christian author and polemicist, stated the importance of the martyr when he said:

> *The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.* [78]

Alistair Crowley (A.D. 1875-1947), a British occultist, says in the same vein:

> *The people who have really made history are the martyrs.*[79]

The Sikh community commemorate the martyrdom of two of their Gurus, Arjan and Tegh Bahadur. Other nations honour their dead soldiers, slain on the battlefields, fighting for their country's honour and defending its frontiers.

Thus, we may emphasize that, in Islam, *Shahid* is a similar concept to the Christian concept of martyrdom; it is ascribed to those who die in a holy war (*jihad*). Such people are considered martyrs for the sake of Allah (swt), and are guaranteed an elevated position in heaven.

As for the Western understanding of martyrdom, we have encountered two different standpoints; one praising it, and the second opposing it.

E. M. Cioran (1911-), a Romanian-born French philosopher, sees in a martyr the solid element that a person with such a desire should be despised because of his fanaticism, and, while he finds fanaticism absurd, he describes such a person as follows:

> *The fanatic is incorruptible: if he kills for an idea, he can just as well get himself killed for one; in either case, tyrant or martyr, he is a monster.* [80]

According to Cioran, the martyr, in his very stubbornness, is a monster. This claim is refutable, as one should distinguish between two different types of rigidity. The negative aspect, which equates fanaticism, is when one insists - despite being wrong - on pursuing the same hard line, showing no willingness to change even the course, when realizing that one is wrong. This is a despised form of fanaticism, and it is fair to characterize such a person as a monster. However, to remain firm and steadfast when following the right path and keeping one's faith is, without a doubt, a great moral virtue. It is a virtue of remaining firm on the right path (*Istiqamah*). In this case if someone is threatened with death, and is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his divine path, whilst maintaining human dignity, such an act is beyond doubt a moral virtue. Therefore, it should be considered as a positive element for achieving perfection.

One can also view this notion in a more balanced way, in the manner expressed thus by Arthur Schnitzler:

> *Martyrdom has always been a proof of the intensity, never of the correctness of a belief.*

I believe that martyrdom reflects the deep connection and devotion one has towards an ideology or a cause, but whether this cause is correct or not is absolutely irrelevant. And, in the case at hand, it has been left for history to judge. Imam Husayn (as), on the one hand, remains an exemplary model for all freedom fighters to imitate; Yazid, on the other hand, is the monster of tyranny, corruption, and infidelity, all of which are repulsive.

There are other Western thinkers who have highlighted other negative aspects of those who rush to martyrdom. Rollo May, an American psychologist, says:

> *It requires greater courage to preserve inner freedom, to move on in one's inward journey into new realms, than to stand defiantly for outer freedom. It is often easier to play the martyr, as it is to be rash in battle.* [81]

However, others have praised martyrdom, and insist that a martyr is in such an elevated position that hardly any other individual can appreciate him. Albert Camus (A.D. 1913-1960), a French existential writer, says:

> *Martyrs, my friend, have to choose between being forgotten, mocked, or used. As for being understood - never.* [82]

Napoleon Bonaparte (A.D. 1769-1821), a French general and ruler, seems to have introduced a correct account of how to understand martyrdom. He says:

> *It is the cause - not the death- that makes the martyr.* [83]

Having fought and experienced many battles and having led the European continent for a long period of time, he realized that martyrdom encapsulates such a phenomenal meaning, as it is based on the cause which honours the individual, not solely on the death. In Islamic narrations, the Prophet (saws) emphasized a similar point; when he heard of a certain person with the Muslim Army who died in a battle, he said, 'He is the martyr of the donkey,' when asked what he meant, he (saws) ordered the questioners to investigate the matter further. They discovered that the person who was killed was fighting against the infidels because they had confiscated his donkey, and he had wanted revenge. Therefore, when he was killed he did not deserve to be called more than 'martyr of the donkey'.

It is thus evident that it is the cause -and not the death- that exclusively forms the martyrdom, and it is due to this fact that we honour Imam Husayn (as). He is a man who sacrificed everything for the sake of Allah (swt) and did not spare even the youngest of

his own family. He encountered all this solely for the sake of reviving the truth, and he deserves to be honoured for this more than any other human being. If Imam Husayn (as) is the man who will stand on the Day of Judgment as the person to have conveyed the message to his *Ummah*, let us quote two of his statements which are related to the end of life, in order to draw lessons from already perished nations:

> *Think where those masters of the world who rebuilt ruins, dug canals, planted trees, and made the cities habitable are; they left them all, against their will, to their heirs, and passed away to be soon joined by us.* [84]

He is reminding us that no one will live for eternity and that all those who have built their palaces and ostentatious houses have perished, leaving them to their inheritors. By this, there is a living example for all; that eternal life on earth is granted to no one. He also states on another occasion:

> *Remember the tombs of your ancestors and your offspring; think how they lived and what sort of end they suffered, the end which you will soon face to become an example to take a lesson from.* [85]

The main message that he wanted to convey is that love of this worldly life is the cause behind each and every sin, and he therefore presents the cure for this moral sickness and blight on humanity, which is to take lessons from the already perished nations; as formed in these two quotations.

Imam Sajjad (as), son of Imam Husayn (as), narrated from his father, who in turn narrated from his father Imam Ali (as), that a martyr possesses seven divine characteristics; about the final one he says:

> *And the seventh is that he looks on the face of Allah (as), and this is considered a relief for each prophet and messenger of Allah (swt).* [86]

In fact, this narration may also refer to a metaphor, as the face of Allah (swt) is a symbol for eternity, and that the martyr's achievement is eternal. It is due to this fact that the Danish existentialist philosopher and writer Soren Kierkegaard (A.D. 1813-1855), says:

> *The tyrant dies and his rule is over, the martyr dies and his rule begins.* [87]

There is another angle from which one can unearth a different perspective of martyrdom as an eternal achievement. It is the intensity, deep devotion, and profound love which motivate it, and create its full charge and power. John Keats (A.D. 1795-1821), a British poet, says in this regard:

> *I have been astonished that men could die martyrs for religion - I have shuddered at it. I shudder no more - I could be martyred for my religion - Love is my religion - I could die for that.* [88]

So when the religion of love of the Divinity is the beginning, the driving power, the motivation, and the goal is for humankind's achievement, then Imam Husayn (as), the members of his family, and his companions are those who certainly deserve the title of martyr. If they were martyred and have suffered, so suffering is the ancient law of love; and there is not quest without pain; and there is no lover who is not also a martyr. [89]

Chapter 3

Ethical Concepts

Moral Values

> *In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious. I, Husayn, witness that there is no god but One. I witness that Muhammad is the last Prophet who brought the message of right, which will never end until the Day of Judgement. I want to enlighten the people as to my leaving Madinah. I am not rising (against Yazid) as an insolent or an arrogant person, or as a mischief-monger or a tyrant. I have risen (against Yazid) as I seek to reform the Ummah of my grandfather. I wish to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. (Al Khatis al Khuwarazmi: Maqtalu'l Husayn* Vol. I, p. 88)

The following is not an abstract lesson about conceptual meanings, terms, logical definitions, and so forth, but a sentimental and emotional one. Imam Husayn (as) possessed an exemplary character and we need to look at his behaviour in order to learn moral lessons from his life.

One of the main moral lessons that can be derived from Imam Husayn (as) is that he established a whole new standard for the moral system, and this paved the way for a newer and revived way of life. On the spiritual plane he (as) decided to give battle to Yazid to oppose Yazid's might with his own nobility of character, to confront power with powerlessness, to meet multitudes in

want of material support, and to defy oppression with suffering and martyrdom. This reflects a man with a wonderfully special teaching and an exemplary way of living. [90]

Imam Husayn (as) was a unique individual, and it was on account of his (as) pre-eminent position, as regards knowledge about God, piety and erudition, that among his companions at Karbalah there were men of notable virtue and outstanding achievements. They were indeed a flower of Muslim society of the time, and a treasury of knowledge and deed that sacrificed itself with Husayn (as). His companions included men who knew the Qur'an by heart, were deeply learned in it and who were the bearers of the traditions of Islam. Such persons could only have been attracted by Al-Husayn, about whose unqualified superiority over them, no doubt could be entertained.[91]

Another moral lesson one can learn from Imam Husayn (as) is to think in a balanced way. If we always think with pure reason and rationality we will never be able to understand life. Human beings have a logical and rational dimension, but also an emotional and sensitive side. It is true to assert that certain aspects can only be understood and explained through our feelings and emotions. The simple phenomenon of crying, whether for sadness or happiness, results from feeling. If we want to comprehend the language of feeling our eyes must be full of tears, otherwise we can never fathom the depths of this side of human nature. We see the love every mother has for her child; this love can never be explained according to reason, as it is based on pure emotion.

According to the Qur'anic *Shariah* law, we believe that is necessary for us all to perform our duty. We must enjoin people to avoid the wrong and perform the good. According to the *Shariah* system this is known as *Amr bil maroof wa nahya 'an al-munkar*: to forbid the evil and encourage the good. This duty is incumbent on all Muslims, and it is because of their failure in obeying this command that many Muslims go astray.

Many may question the wisdom behind Imam Husayn's (as) revolution, asking why did he proceed when he knew he would be

defeated? If we look back into history we can see the way Imam Husayn (as) reacted to Walid, the representative of Yazid in Madinah. Walid summoned Al-Husayn (as) to his palace after the death of Yazid's father, Mu'awiyah.

Walid and his friend, Marwan ibn Al-Hakam, were of the Ummayyad family and were both later to succeed to the throne of the Caliphate. On the way to the palace Imam Husayn (as) and Abdullah ibn Zubair were discussing the situation and reason for their summons. Imam Husayn (as) suspected that they were being called for the purpose of swearing allegiance to Yazid, following the death of his father in Damascus. Imam Husayn (as) made the firm intent never to yield to their demands. On arriving at the palace, Al-Husayn (as) said:

> *We are the household of the Prophet. With us, everything will begin, and with us everything will end, and to us the angels descend from heaven. On us, Allah sent his first apostle, and on us he sent the seal of the Prophets. Yazid, on the other hand, is a corrupt man who consumes wine, puts to death the soul that Allah forbids to be destroyed, and declares his debauchery in public. But we will see about that in the morning. We will see, and so will you, who is more entitled to the office of Caliphate and to receive the pledge of allegiance.*[92]

Marwan told Walid:

> *You have to finish it tonight; otherwise, he will escape and you will never be able to catch him again.*[93]

Walid replied:

> *Woe to you! You have told me to do something that will destroy my own faith and life. I will not take a reward for killing Imam Husayn (as). Surely the man responsible for the blood of Al-Husayn (as) will weigh little on the scales of Allah (swt) on the Day of Judgement. Allah will not look at him, nor*

will He purify him, and a painful punishment will be in store for him. [94]

If we look at Imam Husayn's (as) speech describing the personality of Yazid we see the latter described as a person who publicises his debauchery, drinks wine, and kills innocent people. For most non-Muslims there is no problem with consuming alcohol, it is accepted within their culture. But to Muslims it is something despicable and a grave sin. However, if we look at the fact that he sheds the blood of innocent people, this is a universal crime that can be agreed on by all people of any creed.

The first lesson we can learn from this incident is that we must stand up and state our opinion, even if it is against the authorities. However, this should be done with wisdom, but, nevertheless, it is necessary to do so even if it is a short statement, as with Imam Husayn (as):

Someone like me shall never give a vow of loyalty to someone like him! [95]

He said on another occasion, criticising the people who are attached to this worldly life:

Indeed, people are the servants of this world and religion is (like) saliva upon their tongues: they churn it around on their tongues while they are living. And, when they are faced with a test, the religious ones are rare. [96]

Thus, he promotes another principle of moral values, i.e., to promote the good and prohibit the evil. He criticized them, saying:

Do you not see that the right is not being put into practice and distance is not being taken from falsehood? (This is the position that) the faithful is inclined to be in (when) he meets Allah. [97]

In these few words Imam Husayn (as) has demonstrated that enjoining the good and forbidding the bad is his only goal. Even though people accused the Imam (as) of foolishness for his stand, knowing that he would die, he answered them: 'I am striving for reform in the *ummah* of my grandfather.' [98] One can thus learn a vital lesson through Al-Husayn's (as) actions, and it is this command, and it is the failure of adhering to its principle that has caused the majority of problems that the material world faces today.

The hearts of many people are so immersed in this world that they will never be able to disentangle themselves. As such they become afraid of death, and fail when it comes to having the courage to face it. In Imam Husayn (as) we see the paramount example of detachment from love of this life. He told his companions:

> *Death is just a bridge that will transport you from discomforts and troubles into the wide gardens of Paradise. So which of you does not desire this freedom from imprisonment into a castle? Of course, death for your enemies (on the other hand) is like being transported from a castle into a prison of pain and torment.* [99]

Death, in reality, is a transportation from one realm to another; from the prison of this earthly life to the bounties of eternity. It is mentioned in Tabari's *Tarikh* that a man was listening to the Prophet (saws) speaking about Paradise before engaging in battle. A Muslim who was present was sitting with three dates in his hand; he then stood up and exclaimed:

> *I have only these three dates, and I wanted to eat them. But because you have said how easy it is to reach Paradise, then to the hell with these dates.*

That same man then fought until he was killed, and died a martyr. Indeed, faith and belief in resurrection and life after death made the early Muslims so desirous of martyrdom that fear of death had no meaning in their lives. They would rush into the ranks of their

enemies without any fear, alarm, or disturbance of mind. This unbelievable moral conviction and bravery in action astonished and perplexed the unbelievers.[100]

This was the condition of Imam Husayn's (as) companions. We need to ask why is it that sometimes Muslims are so attached to this earthly life. It is because of their desire and devotion to the illusions of this life which detract them further from the remembrance and worship of Allah (swt). They, thus, forget the purpose of this life and become taken in by momentary deceptions.

If we look at the example of Shimr, one of the most detestable soldiers of Yazid, we see him mocking Imam Husayn (as). 'O Husayn (as), are you hurrying towards the hellfire?' He was provoking the Imam (as) concerning the protective fire that the latter had built around the camp. His aim was to engage Al-Husayn (as) in battle by causing him to make the first advance, thereby absolving them from the guilt of initiating the battle. A true believer must remain calm under all conditions, and this is exactly how Imam Husayn (as) reacted when he replied 'You are more worthy to be consumed by it.' One of the Imam's (as) companions wanted to fire an arrow, but was told, 'Do not shoot at him, for I am unwilling to begin (the fighting) against them.' [101] It has been confirmed that it was the opposition that started the fight against Al-Husayn (as). His goal was for these people to stand on Judgement Day with no excuse. He attempted to speak to them and point out the evil nature of their actions, thereby preventing them from pleading the excuse of ignorance in front of Allah (swt). Riding his horse with the Holy Qur'an in his hand, Al-Husayn (as) approached the enemy saying:

> *O people, let us take the Book of Allah (swt) and follow the practice of my grandfather, the apostle of Allah, and arbitrate between us. Don't you see that I carry the sword of the apostle of Allah (swt) and wear his turban?* [102]

They replied in the affirmative and the Imam (as) asked, 'Then why do you fight me?' The response was based on pure ignorance and illustrates the incapability to distinguish between blind obedience and obedience based on logic. They simply replied, 'Because we obey the governor, Ibn Ziad.' Following orders is not a sufficient reason to kill an innocent man! This is blind obedience, which is prohibited in Islam.

So the second lesson we have learnt is the necessity of maintaining control over oneself under all circumstances, even when facing danger. We must not allow others to provoke us in reactions that are against this control. In the example of Al-Husayn (as) we also see a third lesson, which is to inform people of the evil of their actions so that they cannot plead ignorance on Judgement day. Al-Husayn (as) did not use his sword, he used all possible methods to try and enlighten the enemy and convince them that his was the right path.

Al-Husayn (as) demonstrated the way in which to talk to leaders; he said that leaders of an army will rarely change their minds – exactly because they are the leaders and lead the whole army. Imam Husayn (as) chose to speak with 'Umar ibn Sa'd, one of the army chiefs, and advised him not to shed the blood of any Muslim. He spoke to him on a level with his position: 'O 'Umar, will you claim to kill me, and be appointed as governor of Rayy and Gorgan (now part of Tehran and northern Iran)?' This was a promise made to 'Umar by Yazid, on condition that he killed Al-Husayn (as). He had been deceived by fame, money, and status, and that blinded him from seeing the reality of his actions. Imam Husayn (as) told him: 'By Allah, you are never going to receive that. Do what you want; you will never be happy after my death, neither in this life nor in the hereafter.'[103] Leaders have to be spoken to in a special manner. As the commander of the army, the guilt would lie forever around Ibn Sa'd's neck.

The manner in which to speak to people is further displayed by Al-Husayn (as) when he prepares his companions for battle: 'Prepare yourselves, and may Allah have mercy on you when you meet the inevitable death.'[104] When he spoke with the women of

his group, he consoled them with gentle but reassuring words, focussing their attention from their loss back to their goal. Many women participated at Karbalah; one such woman was Um al-Wahhab. Imam Husayn (as) took into consideration her grief, and allowed her her emotional reaction. Her husband had been killed, and she watched his hand bleeding. In anger she picked up a tent pole and proceeded towards the battlefield. Al-Husayn (as) called out to her:

> *May Allah reward you handsomely on behalf of the household of the Prophet (saws). But return to the tent as fighting is not incumbent on women.* [105]

Imam Husayn (as) empathised with the woman's suffering and grief and so allowed her this action. He took into consideration the fact that such feelings and emotions that can never be ignored. However, he did not want to see a woman suffer in this way so he ordered her back to the tent. They had suffered considerably and would endure further trials after his death.

In another narration he warned Muslims not to be like others who were cursed on the tongue of other prophets (as). Allah rebuked those scholars because they saw the evils and societal corruptions before their eyes yet did not forbid them, for their inclination towards the material gains which they received from the people was high; although Allah (swt) says: 'And do not be harassed by the people and have fear of me.' (Qur'an 4:46), and again, He says: 'The faithful men and woman are friends and helpers of each other. And order (each other) the good deeds and stop from evil doings.' [106]

When the companions had all died, when his family and relatives had all died, the enemy decided to attack the tents with the women and children. See how Imam Husayn (as) reacted when he was speaking with Shimr about this case:

> *I am the one who is fighting you; thus, as long as I am alive, do not let your savage soldiers attack my women!* [107]

This is actually a lesson about chastity. A man like Imam Husayn (as) was telling them:

> *Tell those soldiers, who can never understand reason and emotion, not to attack our women, as long as I live.* [108]

In order to be triumphant, Al-Husayn (as) used all of the emotional steps that he was able to. He told his soldiers never to instigate the war against the disbelievers,but instead to wait for them to attack, so they would only then be defending his family.

> ***'Annal Husayn ibnu Ali:*** *I am Husayn the son of Ali;*
>
> ***Aalaytu en la enthani:*** *I have sworn never to follow the wrong path;*
>
> ***Ahmi eyaalaat ebi:*** *I am defending the women of my father and family;*
>
> ***Amdhi 'alaa deen an Nabi:*** *I am following the right path of the Prophet (saws).*[109]

The Position of Imam Husayn (as) with regards to the Pilgrimage

It is very strange when we consider the route that Imam Husayn took to Karbalah. He began in Madinah, where he received letters from the people of Kufah, before setting out towards Mecca. However, the quickest way to Iraq is not by heading south towards Mecca; it is much easier to travel directly from Madinah. But he decided to first travel to Mecca, so that he could perform the Hajj, an obligation upon every Muslim. Imam Husayn made this sacred pilgrimage many times in his lifetime; from one of these pilgrimages we learned to recite a famous supplication that we offer on the day of Arafat. The Qur'an explains to us that the ancient house existed from the earliest epochs, saying:

> *And (mention) when We made the House a pilgrimage for men and a (place of) security. And appoint for yourselves a place of*

> *prayer on the standing-place of Ibrahim. And We enjoined Ibrahim and Ismail saying: Purify My House for those who visit (it) and those who abide (in it) for devotion and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves.* (Qur'an 2:125)

This Islamic ceremony existed many centuries before Islam and was slightly changed after the Qur'anic revelation. As it had been associated with the practices of the polytheists and the idol worshipers, Islam purified it from any such form. For example, when going from Safa to Marwa and back again in those days, an idol used to be placed on both mounds. Gradually, the Arabs performed this ritual in respect of the idols. The Islamic practice adopted the same ritual but removed the two idols. The Qur'an states:

> *Surely the Safa and the Marwa are among the signs appointed by Allah; so whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House or pays a visit (to it), there is no blame on him if he goes round them both; and whoever does good spontaneously, then surely Allah is Grateful, Knowing.* (Qur'an 2:158)

The Hajj was accepted in Islam, and has been made an obligation upon all Muslims through the following verses from Chapter 22 (Sura Hajj):

> وَإِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ أَن لا تُشْرِكْ بِي شَيْئًا وَطَهِّرْ بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ

> *And when We assigned to Ibrahim the place of the House, saying: Do not associate with Me aught, and purify My House for those who make the circuit and stand to pray and bow and prostrate themselves.* (Qur'an 22:26)

> وَأَذِّن فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالاً وَعَلَى كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ.

And proclaim among men the Pilgrimage: they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path. (Qur'an 22:27)

لِيَشْهَدُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ وَيَذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللهِ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَعْلُومَاتٍ عَلَى مَا رَزَقَهُم مِّن بَهِيمَةِ الأَنْعَامِ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا وَأَطْعِمُوا الْبَائِسَ الْفَقِيرَ.

That they may witness advantages for them and mention the name of Allah during stated days over what He has given them of the cattle quadrupeds, then eat of them and feed the distressed one, the needy. (Qur'an 22:28)

ثُمَّ لْيَقْضُوا تَفَثَهُمْ وَلْيُوفُوا نُذُورَهُمْ وَلْيَطَّوَّفُوا بِالْبَيْتِ الْعَتِيقِ.

'Then let them accomplish their needful acts of shaving and cleansing, and let them fulfil their vows and let them go around the Ancient House. (Qur'an 22:29)

However, on this occasion, Imam Husayn did not complete his Hajj. What could possibly have made him cancel such an important act of worship, which was described by Allah in Surah al-Hajj of the Qur'an:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَيَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ الَّذِي جَعَلْنَاهُ لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاء الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ وَالْبَادِ وَمَن يُرِدْ فِيهِ بِإِلْحَادٍ بِظُلْمٍ نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ.

'Surely (as for) those who disbelieve, and hinder (men) from Allah's way and from the Sacred Mosque which We have made equally for all men, (for) the dweller therein and (for) the visitor, and whoever shall incline therein to wrong unjustly, We will make him taste of a painful chastisement. (Qur'an 22:25)

وَأَذِّن فِي النَّاسِ بِالْحَجِّ يَأْتُوكَ رِجَالاً وَعَلَى كُلِّ ضَامِرٍ يَأْتِينَ مِن كُلِّ فَجٍّ عَمِيقٍ لِيَشْهَدُوا مَنَافِعَ لَهُمْ.

> *And proclaim to humankind the Hajj, they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel - they will witness things are of benefit to them.* (Qur'an 22: 27-28)

According to Ayatollah Sistani, if someone has recited the words of Ihram, he may not abandon his pilgrimage even to visit the Prophet in Madinah. So what made Imam Husayn alter his course? The answer may be found in Surah al-Baqarah of the Qur'an:

> *And accomplish the pilgrimage and the visit for Allah, but, if you are prevented, (send) whatever offering is easy to obtain, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its destination; but whoever among you is sick or has an ailment of the head, he (should effect) a compensation by fasting or alms or sacrificing, then, when you are secure, whoever profits by combining the visit with the pilgrimage (should take) what offering is easy to obtain; but he who cannot find (any offering) should fast for three days during the pilgrimage and for seven days when you return; these (make) ten (days) complete; this is for him whose family is not present in the Sacred Mosque, and be careful (of your duty) to Allah, and know that Allah is severe in requiting (evil).* (Qur'an 2:196)

> *The pilgrimage is (performed in) the well-known months; so whoever determines the performance of the pilgrimage therein, there shall be no intercourse nor fornication nor quarrelling amongst one another; and whatever good you do, Allah knows it; and make provision, for surely the provision is the guarding of oneself, and be careful (of your duty) to Me, O men of understanding.* (Qur'an 2:197)

You may only abandon your pilgrimage if something prevents you from completing your journey, such as illness, injury, or another threat to your life. Imam Husayn is infallible and sinless. He is our example, our role-model whom we follow. So the only reason that

he would have abandoned his Ihram would have been if he was somehow unable to safely complete his pilgrimage.[110]

The type of Hajj that Imam Husayn intended to perform as he travelled from Madinah to Mecca was known as *Hajj ul-Tamato'*. It consists of two stages: first the pilgrim performs *Umrah*, after which he changes his *ihram* at the *Ka'abah* before travelling to Arafat, where he spends the night in the Masjid al-Haraam until sunrise, and then he travels to Mina to stone the largest of the pillars. However, of these acts, only the *Umrah* is obligatory. Therefore, Imam Husayn must have remained in Mecca for a day at least to perform *Umrah*, and then converted his Hajj into *'Umrah Mufradah*, which contains only half of the ceremonies usually performed throughout a full Hajj ceremony. So what was it that caused Imam Husayn (as) to change his mind?[111]

Is it allowable to leave Hajj and change direction?

At the time of Imam Husayn's (as) Hajj, the governor of Mecca received orders from Caliph Yazid[112] to obtain the pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) from Imam Husayn, and should Al-Husayn (as) refuse he was to be killed 'even if he is beneath the cover of the Ka'abah'. Imam Husayn was in a state of *'Ihram*, the root of this word is derived from the same root as *Haraam* (which means 'sanctuary'). When a Muslim is in this state (i.e., on pilgrimage), he is not permitted to harm any living creature or to bear armaments. Furthermore, within the sanctuary of the Ka'abah no one may harm even an insect. But this was the grandson of the Holy Prophet! So, rather than face the possibility of death and the violation of the *Haraam* (sanctuary), he decided to change direction. And the direction he chose was towards Karbalah.[113]

Although following the tragedy of Ashurah in 61 A.H. the name 'Karbalah' became associated with the Arabic words *Karb* (hardship) and *Bala* (troubles); the name actually predates the emergence of Islam. It is most probably derived from two words in the Aramaic language: *Karbu* (farm) and *Il* (God). So Karbalah literally means 'God's farm'. Thus when Imam Husayn abandoned

his pilgrimage, it was because he was heading to another holy place for a far more important purpose: to struggle against injustice in the way of Allah. By so doing he manifested for all humanity the real meaning of pilgrimage: to make your heart the Ka'abah of your Lord, and to struggle for this goal.

As Imam Husayn (as) travelled north from Mecca, he met other pilgrims on their way to Hajj. One such pilgrim was Al-Farazdaq, who questioned him as to why he was going to Iraq. The Imam explained that the people had invited him to lead their revolution and asked what he had seen of the people of Iraq. Al-Farazdaq replied:

> *Their hearts are devoted to you, but their swords are against you.*[114]

However, despite the suffering that he knew he would face, Imam Husayn continued on his spiritual pilgrimage. Historically, following the traditions of their imams (as), the Shi'ah have transformed the visit of Imam Husayn's (as) shrine into a spiritual experience. They have also been willing to face many hardships in order to visit the shrine of their beloved Imam. In the old days, they faced many hardships it they went on a pilgrimage to Karbalah. The trip was not an easy one; the pilgrims faced plenty of threats throughout their pilgrimage. But, despite the hardships they faced, the Shi'ah trod the long path to Karbalah to shed their tears of grief on the tomb of their beloved Imam. It often seemed as if they considered their own teardrops souvenirs, a sacred covenant to which they wish to revive their ties to an intimate friendship with the divine martyr of freedom. There have been countless devotees who have contributed their lives and huge amounts of wealth to spend an hour of their time with the Imam.

The Abbasid caliph of the time demanded that anyone who wished to visit Imam Husayn would have to pay a thousand *dinars* (a large sum of money), but the Shi'ah willingly parted with their wealth. So the caliph ordered that all who visited Imam Husayn would have their hands cut off. The Shi'ah only said: 'Take our hands.'

Many men and women lost their lives on the way to Karbalah. They did not live long enough to make this lifetime dream come true, to kiss the soil of Karbalah. But an extremely large amount of money has been devoted to renovating Karbalah, the province and the shrines. You cannot find a piece of Shi'ah poetry or prose in which Karbalah and the names of the martyrs are not mentioned.

According to reliable traditions, there are great spiritual rewards attached to visiting the shrine of Imam Husayn. It is mentioned in the book *Mafatih ul-jannan* that someone came to Imam as-Sadiq (as) and said that, although he was unable to perform Hajj this year, he did go to Karbalah and visit Imam Husayn (as). Imam as-Sadiq (as) replied, 'I would not tell you how much you will be rewarded for fear that if people knew the reward for this, they would never perform Hajj!' And in some narrations it is said: 'God will give mercy to those who have visited Imam Husayn.'

Imam Husayn changed his direction to go to Karbalah because there was something more important to be done. He was following a Divine order to revive the Islamic rules and the Qur'anic teaching. He knew that he would be fighting (*Jihad*) for the sake of Justice in self-defence. He also knew that he was going to be killed in the way of Allah (swt), however he was informed as well that he would be so revered that such a narration would be mentioned about him. Even when he decided to go to Iraq, Imam Husayn (as) knew that he would be honoured and highly respected by the Muslims.

Such is the status of Imam Husayn (as) that he changed his Hajj. And, over one thousand years later, the place of his martyrdom remains another place of pilgrimage for the believers. He became a symbol for freedom fighters, and an example for those who fight oppression and tyranny. This is by no means a substitute for the Hajj; rather, those who are unable to perform Hajj might be more encouraged, motivated, and rewarded to visit Imam Husayn's (as) holy shrine. When oppressors realize the meaning of such a tradition, they will fight it, and perhaps the visitors will achieve something more in their spiritual as well as their political life.

Imam Husayn's (as) Relationship with Animals

On the day of Ashurah a messenger returned to the encampment where Imam Husayn's (as) family waited, a messenger who would inform them of his martyrdom and shed tears with Zaynab and Um Kulthum. That messenger was *Dhul-Jannah*, the horse and the animal companion of Imam Husayn (as). Thus one topic that we should cover is Imam Husayn's (as) relationship with animals and the Islamic position regarding the status and rights of animals.

The Position of Animals in the Islamic Worldview

Today, Muslims are often accused of neglecting the environment and living creatures. Is this claim correct? Is it true that animals do not possess any value in Islam? Let us first elaborate on this point and how it is related to Shari'ah Law.

The ideas explained in this section of the book are based on Islamic teaching, which is taken first from the Holy Qur'an, the first source of Islamic law *(Shari'ah)*; second from the traditions *(Ahadith)*; third from Consensus *(Ijma')*; and fourth from the Intellect *('Aql)*. Together, these four constitute the source for all Islamic rulings. Many issues relating to animals, such as vivisection, factory farming, and animal rights did not exist fourteen centuries ago, and therefore no specific laws were passed about them. To decide on issues developed in recent times, Islamic Jurisprudence *(fiqh)* has left it to Muslim Jurists *(fuqaha'a)* to use their intellect and form a living judgement by inference, analogy, and deduction, based on these four sources.

Animals are Our Teachers

In the art of self-defence (Kung-fu) and other forms of martial arts, one can read about the many different fighting techniques, which, in reality, are nothing but an imitation of animals. One will be surprised how true this statement is when reflecting on how similar these techniques are to the variety of self-defence mechanisms used by animals. Also, Muslims have often been

advised by their mentors to learn lessons from some species of animals. For example, Imam Ali (as) gives this piece of advice: "Be like a bee; anything he eats is clean, anything he drops is sweet and any branch he sits upon does not break."[115]

Animals are Members of Communities and the Family of Divine Creation

The Qur'an says:

> *There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you.* (Qur'an 6:38)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (saws) explains in these words:

> *All creatures are like a family ('Iyal) of God: and He loves the most those who are the most beneficent to His family.* [116]

He also said:

> *Whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself.* [117]

According to the exegetes of the Qur'an all animals live a life like members of a human community, both individual and social. In other words, they are like communities in their own right and not in relation to human beings or their values. These details have been mentioned to emphasize the point that even those species that are generally considered as insignificant, or even dangerous, deserve to be treated as communities; that their intrinsic, and not perceptible, values should be recognized, irrespective of their usefulness or their apparent harmfulness. The significant point to note is that, physically, man has been put on the same level as all other species.

Human/Animal Communication

There are numerous legends about Muslim saints and other holy men who could communicate with animals. However, for lack of authentication, they are taken generally as mere fables. There is one statement in the Qur'an, though, which proves that man had acquired the lore of speech with animals as early as the time of King Solomon. Perhaps in those days human civilization was more in tune with nature than it is today. The Qur'anic verse says:

> *And Solomon was David's heir, and he said: 'O ye people! We have been taught the speech of birds...'* (Qur'an 27:16)

The Qur'an tells us that God actually communicates with animals, as the following verse shows:

> *And your Lord revealed to the bee, saying: Make hives in the mountains and in the trees, and in (human) habitations.* (Qur'an 16:68)

Thus the Qur'an uses the same Arabic word *Wahi* (revelation) for God's revelation to all His prophets, including the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saws), as it has been used in the case of the bee. This is a proof for the fact that animals have a sufficient degree of psychic endowment to understand and follow God's messages - a faculty that is tantamount to instinct or intuition.

Animals have Consciousness and Societies

Many passages from the Qur'an and *Ahadith* state that all animals are endowed with spirit and mind and there is ample evidence in the Qur'an to suggest that animals' consciousness of spirit and mind is of a degree higher than mere instinct and intuition. We are told in the Qur'an that animals have a cognizance of their Creator and, hence, they pay their obedience to Him by adoration and worship:

> *Seest thou not that it is Allah Whose praises are celebrated by all beings in the Heavens and on Earth, and by the birds with*

> *extended wings? Each one knows its prayer and psalm, And Allah is aware of what they do.* (Qur'an 24:41).

It is worth noting the part of the above verse: 'Each one knows its prayer and psalm.' The execution of a voluntary act performed consciously and intentionally, requires a faculty higher than that of instinct and intuition. Lest some people doubt that animals could have such a faculty, the following verse points out that it is human ignorance that prevents them from understanding this phenomenon:

> *The seven Heavens and the Earth and all things therein declare His glory. There is not a thing but celebrates His adoration; and yet ye humankind! Ye understand not how they declare His glory.* (Qur'an 17:44)

The following verse tells us how all the elements of nature and all the animal kingdom function in harmony with God's laws; it is only some humans who infringe and, thus, bring affliction on themselves. The Qur'an dwells on this theme repeatedly to emphasize the point that humankind should bring itself into harmony with nature, according to the laws of God, as the rest of creation does:

> *Seest thou not that unto Allah payeth adoration all things that are in the Heavens and on Earth - the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals, and a large number among humankind? However, there are many (people) who do not and deserve chastisement.* (Qur'an 22:18)

A Dutch team of scientists found scientific evidence of mental suffering in animals. They discovered that, like the human brain, an animal's brain also releases substances called endorphins to cope with emotional distress and pain caused by frustration or conflict. These substances are one hundred times more powerful than morphine. [118]

Behavioural psychologists such as Dr. Abdullah Atawi, an expert in social sciences, made an interesting distinction between the two societies, human and animal. Each of these societies has its own social order and social structure, and even in animal societies there are rules that animals obey, based upon the instincts that God gave them.

There is an entire chapter of the Qur'an dedicated to bees. And in verse 68-69 of Surah an-Nahl the God of the bees says:

> *And Your Lord inspired the bees: take your habitation in the mountains and the trees, and in that which they (humankind) build; Then eat of all the fruits and follow the ways of your Lord submissively, there comes out from within (their bodies) a drink of various hues (honey), in it is healing (effect) for people. Verily in this is a sign for the people who reflect.* (Qur'an 16: 68-69)

This verse speaks about how God has given guidelines to the bees, directions and instincts that they must follow. And in various chapters of the Qur'an, God has discussed the subject of animals in a highly respected way. Animals have societies, perhaps bees are even the perfect society. Their society's order and function is sometimes better than many Muslim communities, as they have a set social order to which they adhere, and everyone obeys the rules. Animals are following the inspiration of God. They are well respected in Islamic teachings and are mentioned in the Qur'an, not only in regards to their existence and behaviour, but also the benefits of the work they do for us. So we should not be surprised that contemporary social scholars refer to animals as having societies.

Behavioural psychologists make another important distinction: the behaviour of human beings is different to that of animals because the former varies. We cannot say that human society and behaviour will be exactly the same all over the world. For example, communities in Africa have different traditions to those in Europe, and those in China have different customs to those in the Americas. So what could be accepted in one society might not

be accepted in another. What is considered decent in one society might be considered rude in another. However, while the social behaviour of human beings varies according to time, place, and culture, bees everywhere and in every time follow exactly the same rules. So we must distinguish between sociology related to human beings, and sociology related to animals.

It is no exaggeration to say that Islam has given animals rights and instructed us to respect them. It rejects extremes such as vegetarianism; we are told in the Qur'an and Sunnah that animals are to be eaten and used to our advantage. However, as with all societies, we must respect their rights. For example, when you are in Ihram you are not allowed to kill even insects - as they are protected by God, so you must respect them. The world is divided into two parts: sanctuaries (*Al-Haram*) and the rest of the world (*Al-Hil*). Animals in places that are considered *haram* cannot be killed or harmed. However, some mistakenly believe that this ruling is confined to a specific time and place - when we are in *ihram* or within *haram* - and that we can kill them any other time. This is not the case. That is not to say that we can never kill animals, but that there are rules and etiquettes we must follow when dealing with them.

The environment consists of two sections; the non-living aspects and the living aspects. The first of these contains the air, the earth, the land, and so on. The latter consists of plants and animals. We should not assume that Islam and Islamic rulings relate only to human beings and to God. Islam has not only regulated our relationship with God, our family, and our community, but our relationship with the environment and animals also!

All major scholars agree that you cannot go hunting as a sport or kill animals at random. So dumping chemicals in rivers or polluting the atmosphere in which animals live, when this may harm those animals, is obviously encompassed within this. It is prohibited to kill animals unnecessarily. You may not have killed or harmed a human being, thus you may not have violated a human being's rights, but you still may have violated the rights of God's creation. The philosophy behind this law is very simple: animals

were not created for no reason, they have a specific purpose in the natural order and are essential to maintaining the natural balance. People need animals for food and for work. Whole communities subsist on fishing or hunting or by using animals as farm labour. So by polluting the environment, killing, harming, or infecting animals, you are indirectly violating the rights of other human beings who depend on them!

Mass Media Hypocrisy

The Islamic practical laws *(Shari'ah)* concerning the rights of animals are very elaborate and explicit. However one must first think about priorities, so let us consider this example: during the first Iraq war, when the oil sources were destroyed the oil flowed into the Persian Gulf. The Western media made a huge case about the plight of the animals in the gulf. People came to clean the wings of the birds and a large sum of money was spent removing the oil. However, at the same time, these same people ignored the plight of the human beings in Iraq, when Saddam was busy murdering his own people. In this instance the needs of animals were placed above the safety of human beings! So, although Islam accepts animal rights, it defines clear priorities as well.

In the following paragraphs we will attempt to clarify the animals' rights from the angle of being consumed or slaughtered following the Islamic slaughtering codes. If one analyses the different approaches used in dealing with animals, one may see that at one extreme there are some who believe that the life of an animal should never be taken; for example, vegetarians refuse to eat any kind of meat. They believe that we must respect animals and should not slaughter them; that this is a living kingdom and one should respect other forms of life, and therefore one should not eat any kind of meat. This claim is questionable. The reason is that Islam does take care of the animal kingdom, but it has not prohibited its followers from eating meat. Islam prohibits us from killing animals unless we slaughter them in the direction of the Ka'abah and mention Allah's name. Without associating the name of Allah with the slaughter, the meat cannot be eaten and is considered to be impure *(najis)*. The fact is that Islam has its own

rules and prohibitions that encompass our relationship with the environment and our treatment of animals.

Islamic Codes of slaughtering Animals

Now we will address the issue of accusing Muslims of mistreating animals. Halaal slaughtering for example, is considered savage by many people.

Halaal slaughtering is neither savage nor brutal. The Western method of slaughter actually involves delivering an electric shock to animals in order to stun and paralyze them. However, Islamic jurisprudence insists that any blade used to slaughter must be very sharp, to minimize the suffering of the animals being slaughtered. It is therefore forbidden to use any knife which is not sharp, and which may eventually lead to the animal's suffering. Experts in the field of animal physiology claim that a combination of cutting the throat of the animal with a very sharp knife, and the blood shed, will render the animal to lose all feeling very quickly, within sixteen seconds, while the modern method, involving electricity and other implements takes longer - at least twenty-two seconds. Hence in Islam we are following the most merciful and best way. It is recommended that before you slaughter an animal you give it some water to drink and that you do not let it see your knife.

Imam Husayn's (as) Attitude towards Animals

During the early days of Islam, when the Prophet (saws) sent his soldiers to fight, he prohibited them from killing injured people, damaging property, cutting down any trees, and killing animals. The environment, animals, and trees have their own rights and values and must be respected.

It is narrated that the Prophet (saws) was once drinking water, and a thirsty cat passed by him. The Prophet (saws) held the container of water for the cat to drink from, and made it easy for the cat to reach the water. So Islam not only teaches us the best

way to slaughter animals, it encourages us to treat them with kindness!

However, Imam Husayn (as) and his family were without water at Karbalah. When Hur and his horsemen met Imam Husayn, the Imam instructed his companions to refresh the riders with water, and then to give water to their mounts as well. Imam Husayn was careful to give the soldiers of his enemy water, because they were tired and thirsty. He even gave water to their horses.

Imam Husayn treatment of his horse must not be very different to these examples. One of the most famous stories about Imam Husayn's relationship with animals was the one about his horse, Dhul-Jannah, who is often cited as an example of a true and loyal animal companion.

Let us read through the historical details regarding his relationship with this horse. When Imam Husayn came to the Euphrates with Dhul-Jannah, he saw that his horse was thirsty, so he spoke into its ear: 'I am thirsty and you are thirsty, so I will not drink before you do.' And the horse refused to drink. It has been narrated by history narrators that Dhul-Jannah took up its head as it understood Imam Husayn's humble words.

Later, when Imam Husayn was pulled from his mount and fell down to the ground from his horse, Dhul Jannah tried to protect its master, circling him and beating away the soldiers in order to guard al-Husayn against their blows. 'Umar ibn Sa'ad, the general of the attacking army, commanded that the horse be brought to him, realising that it was the best of the Prophet's horses. But when the soldiers attempted to surround it, it kicked out and seriously injured and killed a number of them. When Dhul Jannah was left by the soldiers, it went to the body of its master and pressed its head against him until its forelock was red with his blood. It returned to the tents where Imam Husayn's (as) family stayed.[119] It returned neighing to the women of the household. According to Imam al-Baqir (as) the horse was neighing: 'Woe unto you, O cruel *ummah*, you have murdered the son of the Prophet's daughter'[120]. It returned to the tents of its master's family, riderless and covered in the blood of its fallen master.

When Zaynab and Um Kulthum saw the bloodied Dhul-Jannah, they realised immediately that Imam Husayn (as) was indeed martyred.

Organisation

> *My advice for you is to fear Allah, give importance to piety, and be organised.*

These are Imam Ali's (as) last words before he died, as he called his two sons and gave them this advice, i.e. to be organized. One of the main causes for the present-day backwardness and stagnation of much of the Muslim community is a lack of organisation. Organisation is the key to success, and as long as some Muslims are disorganised they will never be triumphant. Sadly, disorganisation is one of the main characteristics of many contemporary Muslim communities. Muslims must learn a lot from their Divine revelation in all aspects of their life.

One of the main reasons for the success of Imam Husayn's revolution was the fact that he was organised. He followed his grandfather's advice literally, and here can be found the secret of his success and the eternal positive standing he holds.

It is necessary to understand the events prior to Ashurah; how and why they happened, and how the continual thread of organisation culminated in the success of the message, inevitably leaves an impression on the hearts and minds of those who listen.

Imam Hasan (as), during his caliphate, sacrificed his right to hold political power over the Muslim community, and made a peace treaty with Mu'awiyah. In order to make this decision he had to envisage the state of affairs that could occur if he decided instead to challenge Mu'awiyah. Taking into consideration the prevalent conditions and discord amongst Muslims, he made this wise decision to save the community from disintegration. Within his treaty he stipulated several conditions, which were all later

broken by Mu'awiyah. The first thing that Mu'awiyah did when he entered Kufah was to sit on the throne of the *Caliph*, and state:

> *'I never fought you because you must pray and fast. It is only because I want leadership... All those conditions that I have given you (in the peace treaty), are under my feet,' meaning that all the conditions were now destroyed and invalid.*

Imam Hasan (as) was organised in his thinking and planning, and Mu'awiyah was exposed as the hypocrite that he was. Imam Husayn (as) was supporting his brother throughout this period and was in agreement with every decision that he made. Organisation involves knowing how to deal and react within contemporary conditions and to make the most appropriate decisions based on wisdom, not on personal desires or emotional influences.

One of the main stipulations within the peace treaty between Mu'awiyah and Imam Hasan (as) was that Mu'awiyah should refrain from killing the companions of Imam Ali (as). True to form, Mu'awiyah betrayed this trust and murdered numerous partisans of Ali (as). Al-Husayn (as), who was not yet in charge of the Imamah, protested and wrote in the following letter:

> *Did you not murder Hijr ibn Udday and his companions although they were devoted and pious: they were devoted to their religion, did you not kill them yourself? They ordered people to do good and restrained them from doing bad deeds. They were true believers. You broke promises while earlier you had granted them security. Did you not murder Amr Ibn Khulq Al Khza'ie, whose body was full of worship? You murdered him after granting him security!* [121]

In the personality of Hijr ibn Udday, who was murdered along with his son because they were companions of Imam Ali (as), we witness the ability to be organised in the thinking and planning for safeguarding the moral attitudes and the faith of his children.

Mu'awiyah's soldiers asked Hijr whether he wanted to be beheaded himself first or his son. One of the hardest trials a parent could encounter would be to see their child murdered in front of their own eyes. Yet Hijr told the soldiers to first take the life of his son. When questioned as to why, he replied:

> *I was afraid that my son would see how sharp your sword was on my head, and then maybe he would forsake his Imam (as). Therefore to be certain my son would remain on the right path I decided to see his life taken first. He will be killed in front of me, but at least I can be sure that I have done my best in keeping my family on the right path.* [122]

Muslims all have a duty to keep their family members, their sons and daughters, on the right path, even, as with the case of Hijr, if it means sacrificing their lives. They need to be organised about the future of their education, and how morality will be preserved in future generations.

Now we approach the events of Ashurah, and will concentrate on the organisation of Imam Husayn (as). Al-Husayn (as) was summoned along with Abdullah ibn Zubair to swear allegiance to Yazid at the palace of Ibn Walid. Imam Husayn (as) reacted to this by saying:

> *I reject the private taking of oath of allegiance to Yazid, this act of loyalty should be performed in public.* [123]

Al-Husayn (as) needed to ensure his safety. He knew he was going to die but there was a place and manner in which to die. He took his family and companions with him to the palace so that in the event of any trouble they would be able to come to his aid and safeguard him from any harm.[124] To be organised means to be prepared for any situation and outcome. To be unprepared is a weakness, and that weakness can be seized by the enemy and used to its own advantage.

Unharmed, Al-Husayn (as) left Madinah for Mecca, where he began to perform *Hajj*. Having completed the first part of *Hajj*, Al-

Husayn (as) received news that Yazid had ordered for the Imam (as) to be detained, and if he refused or resisted against the authority then he should be killed, even if it was within the sanctuary of the sacred Ka'abah. To prevent yet another sin of humiliating the Ka'abah, Al-Husayn changed his intention of performing *Hajj Tamatu'* to that of *Umra Mufradah*, left the holy precincts and headed towards Madinah. An important lesson we can learn from this action is the importance of being organised so that the enemy are prevented from desecrating a holy place. One must decide - if possible while knowing that he is to be killed - not to let the enemy violate a holy place, and avoid a sacred place like Ka'abah.

If we analyse the alternatives Al-Husayn (as) was faced with, we find he had four options: He could take action, leave the situation as it was, run away, or remain in Mecca without accepting Yazid's authority. To run away or avoid the situation would have led to the sure destruction of Islam, and to remain in Mecca he would have been forced to accept Yazid's authority. The only option before Al-Husayn (as) was to start his revolution, and he took all the possible steps to ensure its success.

Imam Husayn's (as) plan was to act on the political conditions of the time, and that is why he accepted the invitation from the people of Kufah. It is reported that the Imam (as) received about twelve hundred letters from reliable people; a quotation from one reads:

> *Should you accept our request, we will attest that we will be your devoted servants.* [125]

Imam Husayn (as) visited the Prophet's (saws) holy shrine. He remained there for a night, and in a dream saw the Prophet (saws), who spoke to him. Imam Husayn (as) related only two sentences of his dream:

> *Where are you, Husayn (as)? We are waiting for you!', and 'There is a stage of Paradise which no one can reach except the martyr.'* [126]

Imam Husayn (as) proceeded towards Kufah. He entered into a brief discussion with his brother, Muhammad Ibn Al-Hanafiyah, who warned him of the treachery of the Kufans. Al-Husayn (as) knew that he was going to be killed, but his sense of victory was not a political one, it was his sense of duty. It was his duty to fight and die in the way of Allah (swt). The following discussion took place between the two men:

> *'I know you are looking for the best for me, but it is God's will and He wants me to die for His sake.' 'In that case why are you taking your family with you?' He replied: 'It is God's will and He wants them to be captured.'*[127]

It is evident from this conversation that the Imam (as) was already planning for his family members and the roles they would each play on the fateful day of Ashurah.

Preparing for a Feasible Strategic Plan

Louis Pasteur wrote: 'In the field of observation, chance favours only the prepared minds.' And R. Berry wrote: 'The most prepared are the most dedicated.'

Thus we must see how Imam Husayn (as) and his companions were the most prepared and most dedicated truth fighters. One of the essential elements for any battle or operation is that of organisation and strategic plan. Unfortunately many act according to Anne Swetchine's comment that people say: 'We expect everything and are prepared for nothing.' There is no doubt that success depends on our prepared minds! When you are prepared, you are more confident. When you have a strategy you are more comfortable to take a step forward.
Victory for Al-Husayn (as) would not consist of preserving his life or those of his companions; they all knew they were going to die - that was a foregone conclusion. No; for them, victory would be the manner in which they chose to die, the legacy that they would

leave, and the message that would emanate after their souls had departed.

When talking about organisation and foresight, the question may be raised: would it not have been strategically possible for Imam Husayn (as) to have been closer to the river, before the army came and set barriers around him, such that his party would have had access to water? The answer is that this is not a question of Al-Husayn (as) being unprepared in advance. We know that as Al-Husayn approached the place where he was to remain, he was surrounded by the soldiers of Ibn Sa'd. Hurr, who later defected to support the Imam, had been given orders to detain him in that place. Al-Husayn (as) decided not to fight Hurr, but rather to remain safe and quiet in that spot until negotiations began on the 9th of Muharram. So the first point is that he had been surrounded in that area. The second point is that nobody knew that they would be prevented from having water. Hurr, himself, had actually allowed them to drink from the river. When the state of affairs deteriorated to the stage when it became forbidden to allow any of Al-Husayn's (as) camp access to water, Hurr defected to support the Imam (as), bemoaning his sin of being responsible for forcing him to remain in that place.

Another point that we cannot overlook is that Al-Husayn already knew the place where he was to stay and be killed.[128] It has been reported that when he tried to move on, his horse refused. He saddled another horse and the same problem occurred. On asking the name of the place, he was told that it was called Karbalah. The Imam left his horse and exclaimed:

> *O Allah! We seek refuge with you from* karb *(sorrow) and* bala *(tribulation). Here will be the resting place of our animals. Here will be the place where our tents are erected. Here is the place where our blood will flow, where our women will become captives, where our children will become orphans and will be scattered across the plains. We will be buried here and from here we will be raised on the Day of Resurrection.'*[129]

So the importance of the message here is to be organised, even when facing death.

Speaking from another angle about organization, one can discuss the timing and how Imam Husayn (as) was so devoted to achieving peace and avoiding starting a war. He tried to make peace with his enemies till the very last moment at Karbalah. Yet he possessed the courage, steadfastness, and patience, to pay with his head for the righteous cause he had chosen to support.[130]

One may also detect how Imam Husayn (as) had chosen the time in a very clever way. It is an extremely significant message that he chose to perform Hajj, and then unexpectedly switched to Ummrah, to leave for Karbalah. It was, certainly, a political manœuvre with which he achieved a great deal. The entrance of the Master of Martyrs into Mecca and his subsequent departure from it, at a time when everyone else was either going to Mecca or performing Hajj ceremonies, was a political act. It was this and other religio-political acts of his holiness that destroyed the Umayyad caliphate. Islam would have perished were it not for such religious and political moves.[131]

Being Organized within the Social Changes

> *'To bring about a change in society, it is necessary to change its basic thinking and will. If its way of thinking and ideology are changed, the society's attitudes will automatically be changed. In this connection there is one more essential condition. Every action must be a reflection of its social thinking. When an idea creates a wave in society and that wave becomes strong enough to change its social thinking, the will of society is also changed.*[132]

These words from a wise and astute modern religious leader, the late martyr Sayed M. Baqir As-Sadr from our last century, help us to discuss another aspect of organization; that of being organized within the social context.

As already mentioned, Imam Husayn (as) took his whole family with him to the plains of Karbalah. They all played their roles, from Al-Husayn's (as) sister Zaynab and son Imam Sajjad (as), who witnessed the event, and the others, who were able to relay the atrocities that had befallen the Prophet's (saws) family. Once the captives were taken to Kufah, the Kufans began crying on learning of the tragic events. Imam Husayn's (as) sister asked them what they were crying for. She confirmed that they were well aware that it was they who had committed the great sin. That being the case, there was no reason for their crying, as who, then, she asked, had killed them?

They were then taken to Sham (Syria), and constantly tried to speak to the people, explaining how they were in the right, and trying to make them understand that the Caliph was unjust. It reached the point when Imam Sajjad (as) was speaking, and the only way Yazid could prevent him was to ask for the call to prayer, in an attempt to conceal his detestable plots. However, when the *muezzin* pronounced the first two takbirs, Imam Sajjad (as) replied, honouring and praising Almighty (swt)[133], but when '*Ashadu anna Muhammad ar-Rasool Allah*' was recited, Imam Sajjad (as) turned to Yazid, saying, 'Is that your grandfather or mine?'

The people had been manipulated to the extent that they did not even know that Imam Husayn (as) was the grandson of the Holy Prophet (saws). Imam Sajjad went on to say:

> *What do you say? Is he your grandfather or mine? If you say he is yours, then you are a liar. If you say he is mine, then why have you killed my father and my family at Karbalah?* [134]

It is reported that Imam Sajjad (as) started crying, and the whole (*majlis*) audience became astir and finished with this conversation. Indeed, every member of the household played their part on Ashurah, even Ali Aghsar, the Imam's six-month-old baby, who was slaughtered in his father's arms. The tragedy was complete. An army that could mercilessly slay a young child forces those who hear about it to question the kind of morality possessing such

people – such innocence and helplessness can only highlight such heinousness and darkness.

A story can never be found in history where even the animals have played their part in a political and social movement. Dhul Janah belonged to Imam Husayn (as), and he was a loyal horse. When Al-Husayn (as) went for water he spoke to his horse in a respectful way:

> *You are thirsty and I am thirsty and I will never drink until you drink. After you drink then I will drink because you are thirsty.*[135]

In a tradition it says that the horse refused to drink; he understood what Imam Husayn (as) had said, and would not drink until Al-Husayn drank first. It is reported that when Al-Husayn (as) was killed, Dhul Janah went to the tent of the women, and according to Imam Saadiq (as) cried,

> ***Al dhaleematu al dhaleema min qatli Ummatin ibni binty Nabiyeha.***
>
> *O catastrophe, what kind of catastrophe has happened! What kind of catastrophe have they created; they have killed the son of the Prophet's (saws) daughter.*[136]

Thus such noble and holy blood became mingled with the soil of Karbalah. The perpetrators of the crime were clearly known to all. The sacrifices made to save the true values of Islam and awaken the Muslim community were fulfilled. Had Al-Husayn remained and been murdered in secret, or poisoned, like his brother Hasan (as), then the guilty would never have been revealed. By having a public execution, the corruption of the Muslim Caliph was revealed, and the Muslims were shown up for being the hypocrites that they were. Thus there was a manner in which Imam Husayn (as) chose to give up his life, and he planned and organised it to the end.

Also, when considering the social changes at the time, one can read how Imam Husayn (as) described the conditions surrounding his revolution. He said:

> *And your calamity is greater than all the people because the station of scholars has been snatched from you (the rulers have forcibly occupied the station of* ulema *and scholars, and you are blindly following the occupiers). From the Islamic point of view, the implantation and exercising of the ordinances and matters should be in the hands of God's recognised scholars, who are the trustees of His legal and forbidden laws. But you have been deprived of this post. You have been deprived for the reason that you have detached yourselves from the right, and because of your differences in the* sunnah *(tradition) after the appearance of conspicuous arguments. Had you been patient upon the torture by the enemy, and had you endured and borne expenditure in Allah's cause, the matters (the management of Muslim affairs) would have come to your hands, and would have originated from you and returned to you. But you allowed tyrants to impose themselves in your place, and surrendered the affairs of Allah to them. They practice the doubtful (ambiguous), and move in the cause of lustful desires. Your running away from death, and your attachment to life, which (you) must part from, allowed them to impose what they have.*
>
> *O Allah, You know that all that has taken place at our hands (struggle, movement against evils) was neither for the lust of kingship (power) nor in order to gain wealth, but was for the reason of manifesting the signs and symbols of Your religion, and to bring about and implement amendment and correction (reform) in Your cities, to make the oppressed and afflicted amongst Your servants peaceful, and to make Your obligatory and desirable services and commands put into practice.* [137]

In these few lines he sets up for us the correct way to work within a Muslim society; this is a guideline for all those interested in knowing the real circumstances. He then proceeds to explain the sincerity of his position; he was never looking for leadership nor had he ever been interested in becoming the kind of ruler obsessed by power and fame.

Analysing organisation in its group and team work, it can be seen that a community of feelings, thoughts, objectives, and action is required for the organisation of groups of men. Purpose in itself, which may mark the conduct of the leader alone, is no guarantee that he will collect around him followers who fully share this quality. We know many favours that the Israelites obtained through Moses, but, when they were called upon to fight, to capture the holy house (*al-bayt al-muqaddas*), all but two refused to give battle against the enemies. The experience of Jesus (as) was no better. The number of those who accepted faith at his hands was small. And one of them who betrayed him and was responsible for getting him arrested. The Bible tells us that Jesus (as) had told his companions that all of them who would fall into error about him. One of his select disciples, Peter, denied Jesus three times. The other disciples extended help to him but did not stick to the path of righteousness. Similar events happened in Islam, and during the Prophet's (saws) life. One such incident, recounted in the Qur'an, concerns the battle of Uhud, and relates that men posted under 'Abdullah ibn Jubayr to guard the pass in Mount Uhud were ordered not to quit their post under any circumstances, but they left the pass unguarded to be plundered by the vanquished enemy, thus bringing about a Muslim defeat.

It is easy to perceive the secret wisdom by which Imam Husayn so accurately chose his companions. None of the companions of Imam Husayn (as) portrayed any sign of variance in word or deed from their leader in the battle of Karbalah. They remained obedient, firm in their belief, and powerful in their movements.[138]

Imam Husayn (as) was also clever, and had organized affairs in the way he had chosen to die. He never intended to wage war against Yazid with material strength to win worldly power, as he knew it would, militarily, be an unsuccessful uprising. He only aimed to

wake the Muslims from apathy and indifference to the injunctions of the Qur'an and the teachings and practices of the Prophet, and to bring about a spiritual revolution, so as to enable them to see the grave threat which Yazid's accession to the Caliphate held to Islam.

On the other hand, Imam Husayn (as) used the tremendous wisdom at his disposal as he had no wish to sacrifice himself in Madinah, where someone like Ju'ada, the wife of Imam Hasan (as), who poisoned her husband, could have easily been hired to also murder him, leaving the instigator of the crime, Mu'awiyah, entirely undiscovered and apparently blameless. This would have deprived Al-Husayn's sacrifice of one of its chief aims - to expose the unworthy Caliph to universal disapproval.

Sadly, to a certain extent, we Muslims have failed to learn from the vital lesson of organisation Imam Husayn (as) has taught us. Yet to say that we are completely disorganised is also unfair. We want our community to reach the optimal level of organisation, and that is what we have to strive for. We can compare the process to that of a small child of maybe nine months old, who has just started walking. It will take him at least twelve to sixteen or even up to twenty-four months before he will be able to walk properly. Very small children learn to walk by making mistakes; tripping up and falling here and there. This is a good example of the Muslim community; we are new to political life and we need more practice to become professional. There are many pure-hearted believers who are striving, working hard for the betterment of the community; but they are not adept, not professional. When we look at the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was only established twenty years ago. Other non-Muslim countries have been ruling themselves for centuries, so of course they have had the experience and expertise and are professionals in politics, economics, military organisation, and so forth. We Muslims are still learning and so we must not be too harsh on ourselves. The mentality of the Shi'ah Muslims is slowly changing and opening up to new possibilities, which, *inshallah*, will further the cause and help spread the message of truth.

Preparing ourselves for Death

Death is inevitable; an eventuality for which we must all prepare. But what *is* death? And how exactly can we prepare ourselves for it? After all, for many people today, death is merely the end, a finality; as though they had been on a journey or in a dream and death represents its terminus. Those who usually subscribe to this way of thinking are materialists; for whom the end of the physical body signifies the end of their existence. According to them, life is purely about material needs and material satisfaction; thus death is where both needs and satisfaction inevitably end.

- The English novelist E. M. Forster wrote: '*Death destroys a man*';

- The Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen wrote: '*Death removes all debts*';[139]

- Shakespeare wrote: '*Cowards die many times before their deaths, it seems to me most strange that men should fear seeing that death, a necessary end.*'[140]

- And some Roman philosophers who lived before the Prophet Jesus (as), said: '*All we can see is the immortal death consuming the mortal human body.*'[141]

As we can see, these thinkers and authors considered death to be the end. Can we accept these views of death? Is it really the end? Is life really nothing more than a meaningless and limited material journey? Are those sixty or seventy years all that our existence amounts to?

Even non-Muslims find no intrinsic meaning in a life separate from anything beyond the material; it is only natural that human beings look for something that succeeds life, something external and something extra-existential. If you read suicide notes, they often ask the question 'What is the meaning of life?' Is it only about the struggle and hard work of every day? You spend years of your life bringing up children, only for them to leave you. This is particularly endemic of the Western way of life. What meaning is there in such an empty existence?

In this manner, death can simply be the reason for a call of grief, or a glad tiding of leaving this miserable life.

The first statement says: 'I am now parted from my beloved world by death. Now that I have been put in my grave I possess nothing of it; everything has gone from my hands.' The second says: 'I am now parted from this suffering world, and death is a relief for my inner cry, an answer to my love-call, to be unified with the beloved.'

Obviously, the feeling behind the first statement is simple to understand; one has built a world of material fantasies, in which death has declared its termination. The second statement appears to be more mysterious. It indicates that the leaving achieved by death refers to the sense which any creature has in turning towards the spiritual life - as Rumi and other Gnostic experts have stated; the sense of exile from the home of the divine. The word used by the Holy Imams is *(Watan)* home, which marks that life is an absolute separation from one's perfect home; it is creating distance and intolerable exile. In expressing this word, a brief but very strong message is given; that death is the ultimate return to one's beloved home. It also expresses the proverbial nostalgia of the mystic for the divine spiritually eternal state from which we all come and which we feel, in this 'vale of tears' that we are separated from.

However, Imam Husayn, being the heir of the prophets, taught us to live a different kind of life, and consequently to die a better kind of death. He counted on an astonishingly astute psychological analysis - while referring to the political conditions of those Muslims, who failed to do anything about tyranny during his time, as the real cause of these problems, and the cause of all of their political dilemma.

> *You have left everything for those tyrants to do whatever they want in this life. You have given them all of this authority; why? Because you are afraid of death! You are running away*

from your attachment with death, because you have attached yourself to this life.

Or, in other words, one could say that they had sold their soul to the evil Satan, and in return they had received the wrath of Almighty God (swt). He says in another occasion:

A nation that buys the pleasures of living beings in exchange for the wrath of the Creator does not get salvation. [142]

In other words, the ignorance of the Muslims about death has allowed oppressors to gain authority over them and abuse positions of power. As Imam Ali (as) said:

People are as enemies to what they are ignorant of. [143]

But then Imam Husayn considered death as follows:

Death is nothing to me except prosperity, while living under the rule of tyranny is humiliation. [144]

In this saying Imam Husayn refers to himself being martyred as a man of honour, with dignity and doing good deeds. This is the noblest kind of death. To be a martyr carries with it the highest reward; paradise. So whether they are victorious on the battlefield or slain by the swords of their enemies, the believers are always the successful ones. Imam Husayn (as) eloquently explained this when he continued:

Do you not see that the right is not being put into practice? What is more, the people are not keeping themselves away from evil acts. Under these conditions, the faithful are anxious for their Lord. [145]

Far from being pessimistic, these statements are about drawing a line, standing up and saying 'enough' when the people are sinful,

and you are being oppressed and humiliated. Is it not better to die in defence of what is right than to live with injustice and wrongdoing? For instance, psychologists have studied the behaviour of so-called 'suicide bombers'. They concluded by saying that life held no results for them; they were oppressed and deprived of rights, having lost homes, families, and even their own right to live decent lives. When you humiliate people and withhold justice from them, how are they meant to respond?

But how do we consider life in that case? Placing such a high importance on the hereafter may lead some people to view this existence as worthless. This is not the case however; Islam obviously addresses this life and emphasizes its importance with regard to the hereafter. It is, after all, in this life that we prepare for the next, and whatever good or bad deeds we do here will ultimately affect our final destination. Islam does not view this world or the afterlife in separation from one another; rather, the two are essentially intertwined. And death is neither an end nor a beginning; rather it is a point of transition between the two existences. Imam Husayn (as) explained death to his followers:

> *'Death is just a bridge that will transport you from discomforts and troubles into the wide gardens of Paradise. So which of you does not desire this freedom from imprisonment into a castle? Of course death for your enemies is like being transported from a castle into a prison of pain and torment.* [146]

Imam Husayn made it clear that this description of death is reserved for the believers; as a result, death is naturally a respected occasion in the Muslim world. When someone's father has died, he will gather his friends and family together, they will recite Surah al-Fatihah, pray, and carry the body to the graveyard. Whereas in the Western world, death is something that people are afraid of, it is something they wish to keep away from their lives, which is obvious when you consider the description of the hereafter reserved for the disbelievers. The Prophet (saws) described the two differing views of this world and death very eloquently when he said:

> *This life is like a prison for the believer, but it is a paradise for the disbeliever.* [147]

A disbeliever heard this narration once and approached Imam Hasan, the second Imam, who was well known for his wealth. The man of the Book's folks, who pretended to be poor and destitute, asked what had become of this narration, gesturing towards Imam Hasan's expensive clothing. But the Imam, being an intelligent man, replied: 'When I compare what I have in this life to what I will have in the next, then truly this world is a prison!' He then said, gesturing towards the disbeliever, 'But when you compare what you have in this world to what you will suffer in the next, then truly this world is a paradise!'

So Imam Husayn described this life, in this way, when he said:

> *O servants of Allah... beware of this worldly life. If the world could be immortal and eternal for everyone, and (if everyone could) live an eternal life, then they would have to be prophets. But when Allah made this world, he intended it for suffering. And when he created human beings, he intended them for mortality. Anything new will one day be old, gifts will perish, and their joy will expire.* [148]

We will suffer in this life, and the day we die should be the end of this suffering. Everything ages and will one day grow old and come to an end. Imam Husayn said in his sermon: 'Be careful and take the best out of it.' And the best thing from this life is our piety. Just as when we travel we take food with us, when we set out on the ultimate journey between this life and the next, our provision must be our piety. Piety includes Islam itself. Imam Husayn said: 'Seek piety and indeed you will be saved.'

One crucial aspect to achieving piety is avoiding its opposite: sinfulness. The Holy Imam has told us to remember death. That is the best cure for love of this world. We know well that all men have to die, but we think that death is meant only for others, not

for us. To exterminate love of this world from our hearts we should always keep the concept of death before our eyes.[149]

A man once approached Imam Husayn, complaining that he regularly sinned and he could not control himself. He asked the Imam for advice. Imam Husayn responded that he must follow five important pieces of advice:

1. Find food that is not from God.
2. Leave the dominion and authority of God.
3. Find some place where God will never see you.
4. When the angel of death is coming to take your soul, prevent him.
5. And when the angel is coming to force you to hell, stop him.

When you have achieved any of these five, you may commit as many sins as you please. But, of course, which of these are we capable of doing? We cannot find any food that is not from Allah, we cannot leave the all-encompassing authority of God, we cannot hide from his absolute knowledge and we cannot stop the angel of death or prevent the angels from throwing us into hell!

Imam Husayn's (as) philosophy and preparation for death is summarised by saying it is inevitable, and marks the beginning of the afterlife, as it is like a bridge between two enormous realities: the reality of living in the world of creation and the reality of eternal life after death. As a master for all humanity he would admit that time is the past that is irretrievable, the present is the living moment, and the infinitely precious is the future. Here is another point similar to the Imam's advice to prepare for the next life. Imam Husayn (as) was very conscious with regards to death, which marks the termination of the present time, and the crossing towards the other side of the bridge; i.e., the infinite future. And time, as we already said, comprises the past, which is gone, the present, which is the living moment, and the future, which has not yet arrived. Imam Husayn's (as) reasoning places him in a state of the present (*Ibn waqtihii*), which would allow him or anyone to view yesterday as a lesson to learn from, and tomorrow to prepare for, and that all this should be done in the present day. This inevitably suggests that the present moment is the most suitable

time to act. Thus, if one does not prepare himself or make full use of the present, then yesterday we will never have again and tomorrow perhaps one may not be here. And the result could be that humankind will morally perish.

On the night of Ashurah, Imam Husayn and his followers knew that by the following evening they would all be dead. They asked the fight to be postponed to the day after[150], and spent this night, their final night in prayer and supplication to God. So, when the day came and the battle began, death hovered over them, but as it came closer their faces became brighter and filled with the light of God. This is how Imam Husayn taught us to live and die; in prayer and supplication, striving for justice and struggling for a bright future in this life, and a pleasant eternal life in paradise in the hereafter.

Chapter 4

The Meaning of Arba'een

Arba'een: Between Quietists and Revolutionaries

The nature of the day of Imam Husayn's (as) death has something to do with quietists and revolutionaries. The Shi'ah fall between these two groups. Some people claim that the Shi'ahs are revolutionaries and fundamentalists, whilst others label them as quietists because they follow the notion of *Taqeeyeh*. Into which category do the true Shi'ah fall?

The day of Arba'een carries a special description denoting that the Shi'ah are true believers. We read in Ziyaarat Arba'een, *'Assalamu alayka ya Wali Allah wa habibahu'.*

According to the narration of Imam Al-Hasan Al-Askari (as), the eleventh Imam, the signs of a true Shi'ah believer are five:

1) *Ziyaratul Arba'een:* to recite and visit the shrine of Imam Husayn (as) on the specific day of Arba'een;
2) *Ettakhazhtum bil yameen:* to put your ring on your right hand;
3) *Salaatul khamseen:* to pray 51 raka'aat a day. This is made up of the seventeen obligatory raka'aat and thirty-four recommended raka'aat;

4) *Ta'afeeru al jabeen:* to bear a mark on the head from the (*turba*) stone, which the Shi'ah pray on when in (*sujood*) prostration on the ground;
5) *'Al Jahru bi Bismillahi Rahmaan al Raheem:* to add '*Bismillahi Rahmaan al Raheem'* to the Zuhr and Asr as the Shi'ah do when praying, even when they are not reciting the Qur'an, whereas many of the people from the Ahl al Sunnah remain silent when they pray salaat, they, or at the same level of sound.

These five signs of a true Shi'ah believer share a common characteristic. The Shi'ah are confirming their identity when they visit the Shrine of Imam Husayn (as) and when they recite the Ziyaarat of Arba'een. Usually our Sunni brothers put their rings on their left hands, but the Shi'ah put their rings on their right hands, as was the practice of the Prophet (saws). Sunni scholars have affirmed that it is the authentic *sunnah* to wear a ring on the right hand. The Shi'ah are also expressing themselves in that not only are they doing their duty of compulsory *salaat*, but they also perform the voluntary extra 34 *raka'aat*. The mark from prostration indented on the forehead of a Shi'ah would allude to the fact that the person had performed *sujjud* on the prescribed *turba*. By reciting '*Bismillahi Rahmaanir Raheem*' aloud, the Shi'ah are again expressing themselves loud and clear. In all of these signs a Shi'ah demonstrates an explicit declaration of belief by expressing and practicing the religion of Allah (swt).

Here the Imam (as) is pointing to a very interesting assurance in the Shi'ah's teaching. He is teaching the Shi'ah about the polarity of one great point through various movements. Let us speak about other signs before we get back to the first one.

If we consider the second sign, we see that it is a sign of a confirmed tradition from the Prophet (saws), as it reflects the union between human beings and stones, i.e., the earth, which represents the nature of the whole inhabited cosmos infinitely and continuously, and this is usually considered and reflected in

cornelian[1] stones *('aqeeq)*. The Prophet (saws) advised Muslims to wear cornelian *('aqeeq)*, as it possesses many valuable qualities. Imam Husayn (as) wore an *'aqeeq* during his lifetime.
It is indeed the first stone that submitted to Almighty Allah (swt) admitting to His Unity; making the practice of wearing it an act of confession of servitude to the One Mercy-Giver, on behalf of the bearer, and, at the same time, an act of worship to the One Al-Rahman, and a reverse sign of humanity's movement back towards its source.

It is confirmed by the Qur'an, in verse 20:55: 'We have created each and every one of you from (this earth) and will revert you to your root.'

The third sign has the Shi'ah demonstrating his absolute devotion to his Lord through performing 34 extra Raka'ats added to the obligatory ones, to indicate the willingness to be an absolute devoted servant to the Unique Master.

The fourth sign is one of humbleness towards his Lord, in exactly the same way as was His Prophet (saws). It has been narrated from both Shi'ah and Sunni Hadith collections that the Prophet (saws) was once observed involved in this practice after performing his prayers. However Sunni Muslims nowadays do not consider it obligatory to perform their prostrations on earth. Therefore performing our prostration in this particular way reflects the very special mark of being Shi'ah, i.e., the mark on the head from the *turba.* This evidence of what is often a great and symbolic piece of earth, one that comes from the Holy Shrine of Imam Husayn's (as) tomb, is considered as a sign of being Shi'ah. From the narrations, one is able to read that the prayers performed and the prostrations, and doing them on a piece of earth from Karbalah will enable the Muslim to reach to his full extent; it signifies absolute devotion to Imam Husayn (as) and his moral values.

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[1] Also known as *carnelian*; a red variety of chalcedony.

In the fifth sign we also see a clear message in which our firm stance is reassured, as one recites the *Bismillah* aloud, while it is usually recited quietly by Sunni Muslims.

Returning to the first sign, visiting Imam Husayn (as) during the 'Arba'een is another sign for the pure Shi'ah. We read in history that Imam Sajjad (as) and the members of his family returned to Karbalah after the forty days of Ashurah, and this visit marks another period of Shi'ah history, as they were the only real devoted Muslims who survived the battle. It is narrated also that Jaber - one of the Prophet's (saws) staunch companions was also there to visit Imam Husayn's (as) holy tomb, once the family returned from Syria. This movement of unification with the beloved members revived the old days and the tragedy of *Ahlul Bayt* again, and on the desert of Karbalah, Jaber gave his allegiance and his divine oath to the new leadership, which should support all of the Muslims' affairs as was expected of them. Thus this narration reflects the very nature of such an event, i.e., Arba'een, as it marks a declaration explicitly informing others of their identity and ideological devotion.

Are Shi'ahs Revolutionaries, Quietists, or *Mujahids*?

We quote from a book by Nickie R. Keddie:

> *Today Shi'ism seems like a school that encourages political dissidents as in Lebanon, Iraq, Arabia, Pakistan, and elsewhere or even revolution as in Iran. At various times the Shi'ah have supported the status quo and nearly every religious sect or even political doctrine. Shi'ism is seen as essential and changing by its adherent. When revolution is in the air among many Shi'ahs, they will tend to stress revolutionary antecedents and quietism, and support for the ruling power is considered doctrinal as it often was. This would be considered the doctrines of Shi'ah founders.*

The writer has tried to persuade readers that the Shi'ahs have differing tendencies that sometimes they are quietists and sometimes revolutionists. When the writer says: 'today', however, she has overlooked Imam Husayn's (as) revolution. When she claims that it seems that Shi'ism is a school that encourages political dissidents, as in Lebanon, Iraq, or even in Iran in view of the revolution there, she is saying that it depends on circumstances whether the Shi'ah are quietists or revolutionaries. Yet nearly every religion uses this method and claims it as its doctrine. The writer is somehow implying that the Shi'ah are misusing the religion, claiming to be quietists and yet, when they want action, are seen leaping to the support of revolutionary opinion. In another quotation, the writer says:

> *With the growth of populist Islamic politics, the more accurate phrase is the Islamic revival. In recent years there has been a trend among different groups of Shi'ahs to include everything from socialism through to totalitarianism under the headings of Shi'ism, just as there was a trend in both Shi'ah and Sunni countries to call Islamic whatever one wished to advocate. One of the outstanding Islamists had said orally that any religion can be made to mean anything and, while this may seem a cynical comment, the varied history of religion, ideas and practices makes it seem at least partially true.*

The writer is insisting here that, like any other religion, Islam can be interpreted to mean anything, and that the Shi'ah are putting religion into different forms depending on their needs, wishes and desires. Can it really be correct to assert that the Shi'ah are misusing religion or putting religion into different contexts, just to advocate their political lives or movements? The fact is that no, it is not true. The Shi'ahs are neither quietists, in the sense that they are supporting oppressors, nor revolutionaries, in the sense of starting a political movement without considerable necessary planning. The writer attempted to use the differing decisions of Shi'ah leaders to form her own interpretation of Shi'ism. She

incorrectly asserts that Shi'ism is a movement that transmutes according to its wishes.

The Shi'ah are not misusing religion; it is simply the conditions that they face that determine their course of action. Decisions are made with wisdom and must be appropriate for the prevalent circumstances. We know, for example, that Imam Hasan capitulated. However, we also believe that, if Imam Hasan (as) had been alive at the time of Imam Husayn's (as) critical moment, he would have done exactly as Imam Husayn (as) did, and vice versa.

The Qur'an uses the word *Mujahid* instead of the word *tha'ri* (revolutionary). In Arabic, the word *Jihad* is flexible, as the Shi'ah believe that the *Shari'ah* works as a complete dynamic system and not as something inflexible and unchanging. New conditions and advents must constantly be taken into consideration before any action is taken. It is mentioned in the Qur'an and in a tradition that, when the Prophet (saws) greeted his companions returning from battle, he would say:

> *Marhaben, bi qomin qadhu al jihad al asghar, Wa baqiyeh alayhum al jihad al akbar.*
>
> *'Welcome my brothers, this is the small jihad and is very short and limited, for you now remains the more important, great jihad.*

Sometimes a person may believe that if they are afflicted by a wrong and that one is unable to change the conditions, and therefore that one must remain quiet. This does not mean that the person is being a quietist, but rather that one is trying to behave rationally. Sometimes it is necessary to act with wisdom and remain quiet.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad (saws), Imam Ali (as) refrained from taking any outward action concerning his right to caliphate. Islam was new and vulnerable and had Imam Ali (as)

reacted at that time, the unity of the *Ummah* would have been at threat. Imam Ali (as) is in fact a real *Mujahid* and not a quietist.

The Qur'an says:

"فضل الله المجاهدين على القاعدين أجراً عظيما."

'But Allah has preferred those who struggle against evil over those who remain behind with great reward.'[151]

The Qur'an here is explaining to us that there are indeed different classes of people. There are people who are *mujaahideen* and people who are *qa'aid*. And *Qaa'id* carries a negative connotation, implying a person who is neither a quietest nor one who uses one's ability to act rationally. Such a person is not doing a single thing, only going about his or her business. Imam Ali (as) started the war against those who transgressed and committed flagrant violation of other's rights, i.e. the Khawarij, etc., and therefore can be considered a revolutionary. However, when employing the term 'revolutionary', we must be careful as it is not always applicable. The word *Mujahid* is often a more apt description, and is used in the Qur'an to describe people who base their actions on rational thinking.

As mentioned in the Qur'an, when the Prophet Moses (as) asked his people to fight, they replied by asking him to fight along with his Lord. The Qur'an considers an individual with this attitude: *Mutathaqil*. This means 'one who remains firmly in his place'. They were not willing to fight, and told Moses (as) to go and fight by himself on their behalf: '*Fezh heb anta wa rabukch fa qaatilch*', adding that they would '*stay sitting here*': '*Innaha huna qa'cidoon*'.

Qa'aid is translated here as 'sitting'. It carries the opposite meaning to the word *Mujahid*, and is used in the Qur'an to describe those who refused to fight. The word *Ith'aqaltum* refers to those who failed themselves, who were unable to move, as though they were bound to the Earth.

Humankind has witnessed many different revolutions in the recent era; for example, the Iranian revolution, and the French revolution of the previous century. The following are quotations

from two different writers, the first writer is French and the second is American. Albert Camus, a French novelist and playwright, wrote:

> *'Every revolution or every revolutionary ends as an oppressor or erratic.*

Note how he mentions two alternatives.

The American political philosopher Hannah Ardent wrote, in an article in the magazine *New Yorker*, 12th September 1970:

> *'The most radical revolutionaries will become conservative on the day after the revolution.*

It seems that they have arrived at different meanings or different interpretations of what a revolutionary is. The French thinker thinks that a revolutionary would end up as an oppressor, and the American political philosopher writes in a paradoxical way.

If Muslims started a revolution, it would appear that such writers would consider them either as erratic, oppressive, or conservative.

Imam Husayn (as) started a revolution but was never an oppressor, nor will Shi'ah leaders ever be. The Shi'ah view of revolution is different, and because of this they will not become erratic, oppressive, or even conservative.

Muslims believe in being rational in their movements, and their steps will, therefore, remain forever powerful.

During the battle of Jamal, a man asked Imam Ali (as) why he was killing them as they were all Muslims and if he, Imam Ali (as), was the leader of the believers. Imam Ali (as) showed the man his blood-covered sword, and told him that he had never hesitated in his knowledge that what he had done was right. Imam Ali (as) was a revolutionary, but the correct Qur'anic concept that should be used and followed is that of *Mujahideen*.

Therefore, the Shi'ahs are not quietists in the negative sense, but follow *Taqccych*, which is to act with wisdom and make wise and rational decisions. To be revolutionary means to stand against the oppressors, the unjust. Even to fight against your own ego means you are a Mujahid: *Fazhalallahul mujaahideena alal qa'edeena ejran azheema.*

In conclusion, the best term that can be used to describe the Muslims and real Shi'ahs is: wise *Mujaahideen fi sabeelillah.*

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